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General Assembly

Seventy-first session

Official Records

20th plenary meeting
Saturday, 24 September 2016, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Thomson ..... (Fiji)

The meeting was called to order at 9.00 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Address by Mr. Rui Maria de Araújo, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

Mr. Rui Maria de Araújo, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Rui Maria de Araújo, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Araújo (Timor-Leste) (*spoke in Portuguese, interpretation provided by the delegation*): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session, and by wishing you the greatest success in discharging your new duties. It is with great satisfaction that Timor-Leste, a half-island nation in the Pacific, welcomes a representative from another Pacific island to preside over the General Assembly. I am certain that you, Sir, are well aware of the challenges that we face with regard to climate change and the management of our seas and marine resources. I would also like to congratulate the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for all of his work and his unparalleled efforts to revitalize the General Assembly by increasing its effectiveness and efficiency and by strengthening its role as it carries out the duties set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, as well as his commitment to a transparent selection process of the next Secretary-General.

In the light of the fact that this is his last general debate, I would also like to express, on behalf of Timor-Leste, our deepest appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the support Timor-Leste has received during his 10 years in office. His legacy has established the foundations for a reform of the bureaucracy and peacekeeping operations, and he has driven efforts to place human rights, climate change and refugees and migrants at the forefront of the Organization's agenda. As a symbol of the ideals of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon has worked to make the world safer for women and young people, promoted sustainable development actively and fortified the role of prevention.

Based on our accumulated experience and the recommendations included in reports on peacekeeping operations, on the peacebuilding architecture and on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, this is an opportune moment for change. Promoting intergovernmental coherence and strengthening the Peacebuilding Commission and the partnerships needed for its maintenance are recommendations that will improve the United Nations system. Our efforts to respond to the challenges facing our nations and our peoples need to be more effective.

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We continue to be confronted with situations of inequality and conflict that threaten our collective stability. We all know — and Timor-Leste has first-hand experience in the matter — that the United Nations is essential to ensuring the security of peoples and countries throughout the world. We therefore reiterate our belief in the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and in a multilateral and international system, as we are aware of the fact that the world has a continuing need to maintain international peace and security, establish friendly relations among countries, work in cooperation to find solutions to global problems and foster respect for human rights.

Such goals can be achieved only if countries actively seek solutions to the problems they face. Such a belief is confirmed by the results that Timor-Leste has achieved. Using the lessons that we have learned, we wish to contribute to the dreams and hopes of other countries. Through the Group of Seven Plus and based on the principles of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, we are sharing our experiences and knowledge with a group of 20 fragile States affected by conflict.

Regional integration generates opportunities for the economic development and well-being of a population and also contributes to peace and stability in countries and regions. For that reason, we aspire to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, so that we can have an opportunity to fulfil both the dreams of our people and our responsibility to form an integral part of civilization. It is that same principle that drove Timor-Leste, both as a member and during its presidency of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, to propose the concept of economic potential within the transregional constellation, which includes Europe, Africa, the Americas and Asia, for debate among its member States.

To that end, and in order to promote development and the resulting improvement in the living conditions of its people, we appeal to the United States of America to urgently remove its trade, financial, and economic embargoes against the Republic of Cuba.

We are well aware that peace and development are intrinsically linked, which is a concept that we were determined to include in Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted one year ago. There must be no doubt of the fact that without peace and stability, we cannot envisage development, and vice versa. The new Goals are for all countries, so that all may benefit from sustainable development.

Last year, in addition to being one of the first countries in the world to subscribe to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Timor-Leste joined a group of eight countries that wish to serve as models for the implementation of the Agenda by pooling best practices and experience.Over the past year, we have established an interministerial working group that, in collaboration with civil-society organizations and our development partners, has mapped indicators for the 17 Goals to transform our world and selected 20 targets that will enable us to monitor their implementation on the basis of quantitative results.

We have endeavoured to raise our partners' awareness of the importance of harmonizing our agendas and of the need for financial aid in order to achieve results. We are also planning a high-level international conference in March 2017 to discuss ways to advance the 2030 Agenda under very difficult circumstances. We have improved our commitment to show our young people, the future generation, how important their role is in achieving those Goals, to which we all must contribute and from which we will all benefit. Such an exercise is not easy, yet our Government has attempted to be mindful of the Goals in its budget and in activity-planning.

We have also developed additional plans and have included the SDGs in the review of Timor-Leste's strategic development plan for the period 2011-2030. We want the plan's impact on our population to be real and to benefit every citizen, whether old or young, from the city or the remotest village, in the short, medium, and long term. Our experience has already shown that we can achieve an impact, for example in the health sector. Health is our most precious asset, and we want to offer quality health care that benefits and impacts our population.

It gives me great satisfaction to share with the Assembly the fact that Timor-Leste — according to a study of 188 countries published in the 21 September issue of the British medical journal *The Lancet* — is the country that has attained the most progress towards achieving the health-related Millennium Development Goals since 2000, as a result of the country's peaceful and stable environment and its efforts to broaden access to health care. We have also joined the antibiotic-resistance campaign. Concerted action among our

countries will help to reduce the number of cases of resistance and increase the number of lives saved, both human and animal, thanks to the appropriate administration of medications.

The world must place fellow human beings' physical and moral well-being and human dignity above all other interests. The situation of refugees and migrants remains unresolved and deserves our focused attention and support. There is a continuing need for a joint solution to end that situation affecting thousands of people, including children. We still need to establish frank political dialogue and international partnerships to ensure respect for human rights and enable humanitarian assistance.

Other major scourges persist in afflicting the world. The conflicts in Syria, South Sudan and Yemen, among others, are far from being resolved. We hope that the recent ceasefire in Syria may be a step on the path to peace and that conditions may be created for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those who most depend on it for their survival.

We also urgently need to find a solution together that would ensure the right to self-determination for the Saharawi people, as well as a just solution for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people, which must be respected.

As a country that has experienced conflict, Timor-Leste knows all too well the high price of war and how we must do everything to avoid it, through preventive diplomacy and by strengthening the institutions of the State. In addition to contributing to the Group of Seven Plus, we are willing, as we have done in the past, to be among those who contribute contingents to peacekeeping operations and thereby demonstrate our gratitude to the international community. Timor-Leste's past and present can serve as an example and a source of hope: after it emerged from conflict, Timor-Leste became a peaceful country that now enjoys security and stability and whose people can benefit from the dividends of peace.

Even when countries emerge from conflict situations, there may remain issues of security that continue to threaten nations. Acts of terrorism, organized crime and threats to peace and stability have been constant and rather worrisome. The fight against terrorism and all those drivers of instability in the world and our societies require a commitment from all of us to work together towards a lasting solution.

By ratifying the relevant conventions, Timor-Leste has strengthened its commitment to contributing to the fight against terrorism and organized crime related to the financing of those activities. Money-laundering and illicit financial flows linked to terrorism are intimately connected with organized crime, and we are aware of the importance of simultaneously fighting piracy and the trafficking in drugs, persons and arms.

Such crimes are sometimes committed at sea or through maritime activities. In order to combat them and safeguard our economic potential, we must also protect our borders and ensure maritime security. We are a maritime nation, and for us the sea is highly and strategically important. To explore the potential that living and non-living maritime resources offer is to give ourselves the opportunity to diversify our economy through fishing activities, the development of tourism and the development of non-living resources. That requires sustainable development, which is doubly beneficial, not just for humankind but also for the environment. We appreciate the efforts of Fiji and Sweden in organizing the high-level United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 on oceans, to be held in New York in June 2017.

All countries across the globe must take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Island nations such as Timor-Leste are truly affected by the challenges brought about by climate change. Given our commitment to combat global warming and not to compromise biodiversity and marine ecosystems, in April we signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which is currently in the process of being ratified in our National Parliament.

In addition to that global concern, Timor-Leste also faces the challenge of establishing sovereign rights over our surrounding seas through the delineation of our maritime borders. Even 14 years after Timor-Leste became the one hundred and ninety-first Member of the United Nations, we still do not have agreed and defined maritime borders with our two maritime neighbours, Indonesia and Australia. The delineation of our maritime borders will ensure our sovereign rights and give us certainty with respect to what belongs to us, thereby ensuring our economic stability, even our self-sufficiency, and a better future for our people and our nation.

We are staunch advocates of dialogue and the peaceful resolution of disputes. We believe in the multilateral system and international law, in which all States are equal before the law, regardless of their size or wealth. On the basis of those principles ensuring equality among nations we began discussions with a view to delimiting our maritime borders with Indonesia under international law. We hope to do the same with Australia in a true spirit of openness, transparency and friendship.

For that reason, in April Timor-Leste began a process of compulsory conciliation, a mechanism to resolve disputes under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The process, which is being used for the first time, was specifically conceived for cases such as Timor-Leste's, where there is a dispute regarding maritime borders with a neighbour that withdrew from binding dispute resolution procedures under international law. The first meeting of the compulsory Conciliation Commission was held on 29 August, and we are confident that the panel of independent experts, after reviewing each country's position, will contribute to reaching an amicable solution. We are certain that Australia, an important country in our region, will participate and contribute in a positive manner to finding a just solution acceptable to both parties.

In 2015, Timor-Leste undertook a commitment to assiduously work with all nations so that together we can implement a transformational agenda designed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. The Sustainable Development Goals also include targets, and we must ensure the contribution of all nations to their implementation. In that regard, we can never stress enough the need to find solutions to the challenges that humankind faces, solutions that we must pursue in a spirit of solidarity, as well as the importance of acting in a coordinated fashion.

In conclusion, I reiterate Timor-Leste's belief in the multilateral system and in advocating for fundamental values such as peace and human rights. We would also like to renew our commitment to the preservation of democracy, the rule of law, sustainable development, respect for international law and the buildingof a better future for all peoples and nations, now and in the future.

On behalf of Timor-Leste, I truly wish that your term of office, Mr. President, will be crowned by success. Failure is not an option, because humankind is in urgent need of change to ensure the preservation of its existence.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Rui Maria de Araújo, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Allen Michael Chastanet, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Saint Lucia.

Mr. Allen Michael Chastanet, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Allen Michael Chastanet, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Chastanet (Saint Lucia): It is with the greatest pleasure, Sir, that I welcome you to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. We in Saint Lucia are particularly pleased that the presidency has passed to a representative of a fellow small island developing State. I also take this opportunity to congratulate, through you, Mr. President, the Government and the people of Fiji on their gold-medal victory in the rugby sevens competition at the 2016 Olympic Games. I sincerely hope that our efforts during the early decades of the twenty-first century will help create a new world similar to the level playing field that enables athletes from small island States like ours to compete successfully with those from the super-Powers of the world.

On a personal note, it is an honour to address the Assembly as the eighth Prime Minister of Saint Lucia. I come before it humbled by the responsibility that the people of Saint Lucia have placed upon me and my Administration. We are mindful of the enormous challenges of our moment in history, and we are determined to act boldly and collectively on behalf of justice and prosperity — at home and abroad. At home we have given our people a commitment to build a prosperous and progressive Saint Lucia for the benefit of all citizens. We are fully aware that we can succeed

in that mission only with the support of those nations with which we interact.

I have assumed office at a time when many around the world, like many in my own country, are discontented with the status quo. Theirs is a discontent with the ideologies, policies, institutions, and patterns of behaviour that were established in a time long past to deal with circumstances long gone. The old habits and old arguments are irrelevant and harmful to the finding solutions to the challenges faced by the people today. As a result, there is considerable frustration fuelling acts of terror throughout the world, which have escalated into major conflicts.

We recognize that it is through dialogue and mutual respect that we can begin to address long-standing conflicts. We therefore welcome the warming of relations between two of our neighbours and call on the United States to take the next step by lifting the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba. A strong Cuban economy would strengthen the region in general.

There is no doubt whatsoever that we face many challenges within our international community. But the majority of our challenges are, at their most basic, symptomatic of a single underlying issue: the denial of access to basic human rights, including education, health care, justice and security. We must accept that those pillars are fundamental human rights and, as such, are the very foundation upon which our nations must grow. Our failure to provide and ensure those rights to our citizens in crucial areas of life breeds dangerous challenges that mushroom beyond national and regional borders and impact us all in the global community.

We leaders gather in this great Hall every year to engage in the general debate and deliberate on the challenges and successes of the international order. Yet the very format of the debate is problematical, given that while many speak, few stay around to listen, far less respond. Is it any wonder, then, how and why this entity is so negatively perceived by the persons who elected us to serve? As a small island State and Member of this body, our voice is meant to be equal, but long experience and realpolitik have proven the contrary. Instead of being invited to participate in finding a cure for the cause of our challenges, we are forced to accept remedies proposed by others to the symptoms of the maladies.

Given our small size and limited choices for economic expansion, small island States like my own have looked to the more advanced economies for innovative means of economic development. We have adopted programmes created by those States, such as the citizenship-by-investment programmes, financial services and trusts. Yet we find ourselves being penalized and criticized by the very architects of such programmes, as they brand us as tax havens and compromise our ability to grow our economies. We are therefore left to dance between the raindrops.

A painful example of such exclusion is the inescapable fact that, while we continue to feel the negative effects of the 2008-2009 global financial and economic crisis, we are not involved in the solutions to the problems. As we know, the Group of 20 (G-20) has designated itself as the forum for our collective international economic cooperation. However, Saint Lucia, like the majority of the States Members of the United Nations, is not a member of the G-20, and we were not consulted on its appointment as the arbiters of our economic fate.

The G-20 also has a serious legitimacy problem. Aside from being unofficial and non-inclusive, many of the countries at the table represent the champions of the existing economic and financial systems and policies that led the world into the crisis in the first place. The crisis has produced increased poverty, suffering and social and political upheaval in our States. Its disproportionate impact on the poor has only widened the gap between developing and developed countries.

The current combination of the real impacts of global warming, the financial crisis and stagnant global economies has left many small island middle-income countries in a state of high debt and unemployment. And the new threat of de-risking will cause further deterioration in our economies.

While we fully support the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and its ambition to deal with global warming, we are patiently waiting for its financing to be agreed. In the light of that, we wholeheartedly endorse the call by the Prime Minister of Jamaica for an initiative to assist highly indebted middle-income countries, underpinned by the principle that their structural vulnerabilities cannot be eliminated by diversification.

Every single Member State should be honest in shouldering its responsibilities. Nothing is easier than

blaming others for our troubles and absolving ourselves of responsibility for our choices and our actions. True leadership in this new world order demands much more. We must bring ourselves in tune with the call of the times.

We say that our destinies are interlinked, as we have all adopted a universal approach to sustainable development through the Sustainable Development Goals, but we still think in terms of a zero-sum game. The truth is that the world has been endowed with abundant natural resources, which, if put to proper use, could wipe out poverty throughout the world. There is therefore no need to continue to create a world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another.

In this Hall we come from many places, but we share a common future. No longer do we have the luxury of indulging our differences to the neglect of the work that we must do together. The magnitude of our challenges has yet to be met by the measure of our actions. The United Nations was founded on the belief that the nations of the world should solve their problems together. It was rooted in the hard lessons of war and in the wisdom that nations could advance their interests by acting together instead of holding steadfast to their insular policies. The time has come for the world to move in a new direction. The technological revolution of the twenty-first century is creating a new global village. We must embrace a new era of engagement based on common needs, innovative ideas and mutual respect. And that work must begin now.

We must decide whether the United Nations can continue to be a place where we continue our outdated grievances or a place we begin to forge common ground. We must decide to put less focus on what drives us apart and more emphasis on what brings us together. We must decide to give renewed meaning to the promise embedded in the name given to this institution, namely, the United Nations. Under my watch, Saint Lucia stands ready to collaborate more meaningfully with its neighbours in the emerging global village. We must adopt policies and programmes that put citizens and their basic human needs first. We must not accept easy fixes nor any solution that undermines the ability of any State to deliver on its promise to provide education, health care, justice and security to all its citizens.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Saint Lucia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Allen Michael Chastanet, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Gaston Alphonso Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda.

Mr. Gaston Alphonso Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Gaston Alphonso Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Browne (Antigua and Barbuda): On behalf of my Government and my people, I congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session.

This will be the last General Assembly at which His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon will serve the peoples of the world as Secretary-General. I wish to now place on record my country's great appreciation of his stewardship of our affairs. The task of the Secretary-General is not easy. Occupied with trying to resolve conflicts around the world, stop bloodshed, mediate diverse positions between Governments, address hunger and malnutrition, uphold human rights, including the rights of women, refugees and vulnerable communities, work tirelessly to secure peace and ensure development in its widest meaning. All of that is deeply challenging and enormously worrisome. Managing it all involves exhausting travel, the neglect of family responsibilities, and wearisome nights without sleep. Therefore, on behalf of my people, I wish to record our deep appreciation for all of the Secretary-General's unstinting efforts.

I thank him particularly for the 10 years of diligence that he has devoted to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which our Governments adopted in September 2015. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice and tackle climate change by 2030 are of vital interest to the well-being of small countries, such as mine. Of course, we are disappointed that many of the Goals remain aspirational and lack a legally binding commitment to the funding that is crucial for their implementation. But we are realistic enough not to reject the good just because we did not get the perfect. We will continue to

advocate for fairness and equity in the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

My small island State is also grateful to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his conscientiousness in promoting an agreement on climate change, which our nations collectively signed in Paris last year. My Government was pleased to deposit its instrument of ratification of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change earlier this week at here at Headquarters. I urge the countries that have not yet signed or ratified the Agreement to do so without delay. Time is not on our side.

I remind the representatives of all nations gathered in this Hall that the present pledges to reduce emissions are still insufficient to limit global temperature rise to well below 2° Celsius and to build climate resilience. At a rise of 1.5° Celsius, many of our countries — or parts of them — will still be washed away. Temperatures continue to rise, as the bell is tolling.

The bell may be tolling for small islands, but in the words of the poet John Donne, "it also tolls for thee". The ravages of climate change will not end with the erosion of small island States, nor will its consequences disappear with the last surging tide. Its refugees, its displaced people and the misery of its effects will wash up on the shores of those who dismiss or neglect the issue today.

Our small countries endure the problems caused by climate change not because we created it, but because we are the victims of the polluting profligacy of others. But we are not content to simply wring our hands in anguish or throw up our arms in despair. We are keen to help provide solutions. That is why my Government has repeatedly proposed debt swaps for climate-change adaptation and mitigation. Many of our small island States are burdened by high debt because we are denied access to concessionary financing and are forced to borrow at high commercial rates to rebuild after disasters and to mitigate against them. High debt is not only a drag on our economic growth; it constrains our ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. We are caught in a very vicious cycle.

We have proposed that we be provided with soft loans to stop further high debt accumulation while we build resilience to global warming and sea-level rise. However, for us to qualify for soft loans, the international financial institutions and donor Governments must stop using per capita income as a criterion. So far, our pleas have fallen on deaf ears. Beyond the facade of high per capita income is our increasing poverty, high levels of household and individual vulnerability, acute issues in health and education and worrying rates of unemployment, especially among youth. High per capita income distorts the reality that, because of the openness of our small economies and our dependence on foreign investment, a minority of the population earns the largest percentage of income, leaving the majority at subsistence level and below.

Those facts are known to international financial institutions and those who govern them, yet they are ignored. The more appropriate criteria for allowing access to concessionary financing should be our very well-known vulnerability to shocks that are generated from outside our shores and over which we have no control. The cost to institutions, such as the World Bank, of refining their criteria would not be very high, but such access would represent a significant measure enabling our small countries to improve our economic performance.I have to admit a deep sense of frustration and disappointment that, year after year, other Heads of Government of small States and I have come to the Assembly and explained the challenges that confront us, but to no avail. We remain trapped in the reality of a narrow tax base, high debt, large trade deficits, small underdeveloped domestic financial markets, small private sectors and fragile banking systems. I remind the Assembly of Albert Einstein's observation:

> "In matters of truth and justice, there is no difference between large and small problems, for issues concerning the treatment of people are all the same."

The truth of the situation facing small States is obvious to all; so too should be the need for justice. My country, having resumed negotiations with the Government of the United States on the outstanding World Trade Organization matter, looks forward to a speedy resolution as we continue to find innovative ways to build our country.

In terms of the grave challenges to the economic viability facing my country and the Caribbean region, I can now point to an urgent and existential threat of considerable relevance to our survival. The latest challenge that our countries face is the decision by global banks to discontinue correspondent banking relations with our financial institutions. In the

international campaign against money laundering and terrorist financing, very strict penalties have been imposed on banks by regulatory bodies in North America and Europe for any infringement of the stringent regulations.

In that environment, where even the slightest infraction could expose a bank to a fine of hundreds of millions of dollars, many banks have chosen to withdraw essential correspondent banking relations from financial institutions in the Caribbean, Central America and Africa. They call that process "de-risking". I call it economic destruction. It is now prevalent in the Caribbean, but it also exists in parts of Africa and Central America. It will spread, with global consequences, unless it is curbed through collective action.

All those countries, including mine, are now at the point of losing vital correspondent banking relationships. The consequences would be calamitous. We would be severed from the world's trading system, unable to pay for basic goods and services that we purchase or to receive payments for goods and services that we sell to other countries. Remittances from our diaspora would be cut off, causing more of the population to depend on social welfare at a time when our economies are already under great stress.

In other words, a growing cancer is eating away at development — a cancer that is threatening the stability of our region and denying us the right to participate in the international economy. But that is not all. Since the consequence of being cut off from the world trading system would be economic collapse, not only would poverty and crime dramatically increase, so too would the very global scourge that every nation fears — an increase in refugees and human trafficking.

The consequences would not be limited to our countries. Worse yet, financial transactions that are now regulated and monitored by law enforcement agencies would be forced underground, creating huge opportunities for money laundering and terrorism financing. That would undermine the global, multilateral cooperation that is required to fight those scourges. And it is important to be aware of the fact that, in all the money laundering and terrorism financing cases that have been prosecuted in the world, not one of them involved a Caribbean financial institution.

De-risking is a substantial matter; its far-reaching consequences could create fundamental problems for our countries. The threat that we face in the Caribbean is real; the danger is imminent. But, make no mistake, no country will be immune from its consequences if it is left unchecked.

I am grateful to the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, Ms. Christine Lagarde, for her timely and important statement made on 18 July at the New York Federal Reserve, in which she said,

> "I am concerned that not all is well in this world of small countries with small financial systems. In fact, there is a risk that they become more marginalized."

She went on to say that

> "all actors have a part to play: countries need to upgrade their regulatory frameworks; regulators in key financial centres need to clarify regulatory expectations and ensure consistent application over time; and global banks need to avoid knee-jerk reactions and find sensible ways to reduce their costs. There is a lot at stake. For both the big and the small. For all of us."

Ms. Lagarde could not be more right, and her summons to the international community should be a clarion call to all.

In the case of the Caribbean, my colleagues the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community mandated me to convene a high-level conference on that matter to address it in a holistic fashion. It will be held in Antigua on 27 and 28 October, and I have already issued invitations to key global stakeholders.. Our objective at that conference will be to work collectively to end that huge threat to the well-being of our region. We are acting responsibly, and I call on the General Assembly to recognize the substantial and dangerous nature of this issue, and to join us in addressing it constructively.

Our nations operate in the United Nations system in the context of some kind of global order. It is a global order that is supposed to be underpinned by the Charter of the United Nations. Reference is often made to the first goal cited in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, which is "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind".

It is of course right that we should do so. For even though that principle is enshrined in the Charter

and is legally binding on all Member States, conflict and carnage continue in several parts of the world, particularly the Middle East. And, as the Secretary-General lamented in his presentation of his report on the work of the Organization (A/71/1) to this session of the General Assembly, "Powerful patrons who keep feeding the war machine also have blood on their hands." (see *A/71/PV.8*).

But, at least in recent years, wars have been reduced and isolated. In that regard, the commitment of States to the Charter has made our world a safer place for the majority of our people.

However, it is the other three goals in the Preamble that our nations have yet to meet. And because of that failure, developing countries and small States such as mine remain marginalized, outside the bounty of the world. I remind everyone of those three goals:

> "To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
>
> "To establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
>
> "To promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom".

The global order under which we live and conduct our relations pays only lip service to those principles and ideals. That is why Guantánamo Bay in Cuba is still occupied by the United States and the United States embargo on that country continues, despite the wishes of the people and the Government of Cuba. That is why bodies such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a club for rich countries, Unilaterally make rules on financial matters, which they impose on other countries, which have no say. That is why powerful countries brand regions in the Caribbean and Pacific as tax havens, with all the negative and harmful consequences that such branding entails. That is why the Caribbean region can be arbitrarily and unfairly severed from vital correspondent banking relationships. That is why countries such as mine have no voice of our own and no vote in the decision-making councils of the international financial institutions that make and implement the rules that materially affect our lives.

"Might is right" continues to be the principle underpinning the mentality of the powerful. But our world cannot be free from poverty, conflict, terror, inequity and injustice while the powerful take advantage of the weak. In the words of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." It is time that the global order recognize that self-evident truth.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Gaston Alphonso Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Timothy Harris, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Mr. Timothy Harris, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Timothy Harris, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Harris (Saint Kitts and Nevis): On behalf of the Government and the people of our proud Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on your election to lead the General Assembly at its seventy-first session, and I thank you for the honour of addressing the Assembly.

We know that under your tenure, Mr. President, we will focus on striving for the key development goals for 2030 — people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. They represent broad global issues that are of particular concern to the small island developing States of the Caribbean region. Indeed, many of the problems facing our world today are linked and should be addressed holistically and multilaterally.

Today in various corners of the world we see masses of people losing faith in the ability of established institutions to defend their interests and respond adequately to their needs. On an almost daily basis we witness an increase in acts of violence against innocent

people. We look on, seemingly helpless, as large groups of people feel alienated and isolated in their own countries, with some of them forced to uproot their families and risk their lives to escape armed conflict in search of security and better opportunities.

It is clear that the causes of many of those problems are rooted in years of social neglect and entrenched economic inequities. We cannot resolve them by simply dismissing people's fears, stereotyping them or resorting to isolationism, xenophobia and protectionism. Our response must be to develop better partnerships and find common ground. Our global challenges demand that we build bridges, not walls. We must strengthen our commitment to multilateralism and cooperation. We must empower international institutions, civil society and the private sector to play a much greater role. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a perfect platform and framework for achieving that in partnership.

Empowering our young people is critically important to the transformation of our world. There is a common view that significant intervention is required in order to nurture aspiration, vision, leadership and a sense of civic responsibility. By providing opportunities for the constructive engagement of young people in critical matters that directly affect them and society, we can transform their frustration into meaningful empowerment. We should tackle head-on the increased incidence of youth-on-youth violence, which is invariably symptomatic of deeper societal issues. We cannot dismiss young people's evident despair. We have to adopt a multisectoral and integrated approach in order to find ways to make them see that violence is not the answer. In Saint Kitts and Nevis we have focused on job creation, skills enhancement, entrepreneurship, counselling and support to teenage mothers and the provision of other targeted social services.

It is important to note that on 4 July 2011, in keeping with our commitment to working more collaboratively to halt the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the Caribbean Governments adopted the Declaration on Small Arms and Light Weapons of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in my own country's capital of Basseterre. Those weapons have had devastating effects on many young lives and families. Saint Kitts and Nevis has now signed and ratified the Arms Trade Treaty, but we are still in need of much support.

Saint Kitts and Nevis, like so many small island developing States, remains inherently vulnerable, owing mainly to our small physical size, open economy, lack of economies of scale and, of course, small population. As we have seen time and again, a climate event that lasts only a few hours can wreak havoc on every single aspect of life on our islands. In the past we have asked that the international community address the issue of creating a strategy for the promotion of climate financing, and I once again reiterate that call. It is meaningless to say that billions of dollars are available for climate financing if the mechanisms for accessing the money are opaque, prohibitive and extremely difficult to penetrate. Again, I urge common-sense cooperation and partnership.

We are being further marginalized in the global financial system. Already in the Caribbean, as of the first half of this year, some 16 banks across five countries have lost all or some of their correspondent banking relationships, putting the financial lifeline of those countries at great risk. In our economies, which depend heavily on tourism and remittances as major factors in national development, such actions threaten to derail progress and undermine trade, direct foreign investment and the repatriation of business profits.

Furthermore, we urge the Group of Seven, the Group of 20 and the international financial institutions to re-evaluate the methodologies used to assess whether and how a country qualifies for concessional support or access to certain types of international funds. The arbitrary classification of certain small nations, like Saint Kitts and Nevis — or Dominica, for that matter — as middle-income countries can never make sense when such a country might see its economy grow from 4 to 6 per cent in one year and then watch helplessly as nearly 100 per cent of its gross domestic product is wiped out in six hours of wind and rainfall from a tropical storm. Any new formula must include vulnerability and resilience indices.

As the Prime Minister in the CARICOM quasi-cabinet with lead responsibility for health and human development, I encourage this body and like-minded Governments to join me in re-energizing our efforts to fight non-communicable diseases and antimicrobial resistance, as well as communicable diseases like HIV/AIDS. That fight is consistent with international efforts to meet our SDG targets. It serves to promote human security, improve individual choices and empower citizens. Saint Kitts and Nevis is grateful to the General

Assembly for its continued advocacy, as well as to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS for its support to the Pan-Caribbean Partnership against HIV and AIDS, which has been declared an example of international best practices. We are also proud of the strides that we have made in reducing mother-to-child infection at birth by 97 per cent, and of our efforts to ensure ongoing and more cost-effective access to antiretroviral drugs and treatment and to reduce, through education, the stigma associated with the disease. But the battle is far from won. The Caribbean is still an area of very high prevalence.

It is essential to invest more in education in order to promote healthier lives and healthier food choices, as well as to help people make the right lifestyle choices, because several of the non-communicable diseases are preventable. In the long term, by implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, we can reduce the enormous costs of treatments associated with non-communicable diseases, which in turn could contribute significantly to meaningful economic development. It is worth the investment so that we can protect our most critical national asset — our people. In all our efforts, they matter most.

Many of the difficulties that I have outlined have been made less burdensome because the Government and the people of Saint Kitts and Nevis have been fortunate enough to have benefited from some durable and meaningful partnerships, which have been integral to our efforts to build resilience, transform our country, modernize our economy, upgrade our workforce, educate our people and empower our citizenry. There have also been outstanding models of South-South cooperation worthy of emulation. For example, Cuba's support to the developing world in education and training, health care, agriculture and heritage development dwarfs the assistance of many economically advanced countries. Venezuela's Bolivarian energy outreach through Petro Caribe is an important model. There must be a greater commitment to share prosperity.

Additionally, in the past three decades, the tangible support of the Government and the people of Taiwan has been remarkable. Taiwan has stood shoulder to shoulder with the Government and the people of Saint Kitts and Nevis and remains steadfast in its commitment to support our determination to meet our people-empowerment agenda. Their help and solidarity touch almost every facet of life in our twin-island federation. Such advantages and benefits should not be limited to a few countries. I know that Taiwan is eager to share its progress and development successes with the rest of the world. I therefore recommend new opportunities for Taiwan and its people to be warmly welcomed and integrated into the international fraternity of nations as a global player whose commitment to the principles of democracy, peace and people empowerment can touch many more lives.

The future of our planet and our citizens cannot be outsourced to any one country or group of countries. In today's highly interdependent and integrated world, that future is our collective commons, demanding the full engagement of all countries and their citizens.

Lastly, I would like to sound a cautionary note. My Government, like most of the international community, believes that the recent nuclear tests conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea constitute a threat to peace and security on the Korean peninsula and in the world in general. Such nuclear tests violate Security Council resolution 2270 (2016) and the well-established regime relating to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Saint Kitts and Nevis stands resolutely with those who seek to ensure a peaceful world free of the ravages of war and violence.

Mr. Mnatsakanyan (Armenia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Despite the many challenges we face, I am convinced that we can achieve our individual goals by working together as an international community to make the right decisions and triumph over adversity. Now is the time for a bolder and grander vision of partnership. As the peoples of the world, we joined together to celebrate our achievement in the SDGs. As the peoples of the world, we achieved a landmark climate deal at the Paris Conference on Climate Change. They are examples of what we can do working together for the ultimate benefit of all. Let us now, therefore, resolve to achieve even greater success in the years leading up to 2030.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Timothy Harris, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland.

Mr. Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure welcoming His Excellency Mr. Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Dlamini (Swaziland): I bring warm and fraternal greetings from His Majesty King Mswati III, Head of State and iNgwenyama of the Kingdom of Eswatini, the Queen Mother Indlovukati and the entire Swazi nation. His Majesty would have loved to join everyone for this eminent occasion. However, owing to other pressing engagements, he has delegated me to represent him and deliver the national statement of the Kingdom of Eswatini. Our Kingdom is committed to contributing to global issues that affect humankind in the universe.

Allow me to express our sincere congratulations to the President on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session and to commend the leadership of His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, outgoing Secretary-General, who has performed a sterling job as leader of the Organization for the past 10 years. We also congratulate the United Nations staff for the remarkable work that they do in many parts of the world, in which they promote peace and create a conducive environment for humankind to live in, sometimes under very difficult situations.

The theme of this session — "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world" — calls upon all of us to contribute to the development of our respective countries and continents. This theme is indeed a cross-cutting subject that covers every aspect of life. We are pleased to inform the General Assembly that the Kingdom has done a lot to mainstream and popularize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through public-awareness campaigns, education and training at all levels. The Kingdom of Eswatini has also integrated the Goals into the national development framework. Furthermore, appropriate institutional arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the implementation of the Goals is properly monitored at all levels.

Both the executive and legislative arms of Government are fully involved, and the progress achieved is periodically reported to the Cabinet and Parliament. Our purpose is to achieve all-inclusiveness in the implementation of the SDGs. In that way, we seek to infuse the spirit of ownership into every citizen, so that they understand and appreciate the importance of the SDGs and why they need to participate in the implementation of the Goals, because we do not want to leave anyone behind.

It is important to underline that the implementation process is at its infancy stage. Furthermore, as expected, the process is faced with teething challenges owing to limited human, technological and financial resources, to name but a few.

The Government has translated the national vision, Vision 2022, into practical and feasible targets to expedite economic growth and focus the country's efforts on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. We have established procedures for tracking progress in the attainment of first-world status. The indicators set cover eight focal areas: economic prosperity, education, health care, service delivery, infrastructure, agricultural and environmental sustainability, governance and corruption.

It is against that backdrop that we have revised the national development strategy with a view to emphasizing linkages between the national development agenda, the SDGs and the African Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. For example, education and training are aligned to Sustainable Development Goals 1, 4, and 5. That thematic area is also linked to goals 1, 2, and 18 of Agenda 2063. The country will improve the quality of education by enacting policies that will revolutionize the education system in the Kingdom. The State will direct efforts towards the introduction of science, technology and innovation, as well as the redesign and presentation of technical and vocational training and education in entrepreneurship at the primary-school level so as to inculcate a culture of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship at a tender age.

Health care is one of our top national priorities, which is in line with thematic area 4, which focuses on good health. And that thematic area links directly to goals 1 and 3 of Agenda 2063 and Sustainable

Development Goals 1, 2, 3, and 6. Under that thematic area, the strategies prioritized for the country's health sector include promoting health throughout one's life, disease prevention, prompt and efficient management of medical and related conditions, rehabilitation and influencing health-related activities in the relevant primary sectors. The country will specifically strengthen health-care financing and investment and fast-track the establishment of a national health-insurance system to ensure the equity, efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of health services.

Under thematic area 5, the country has prioritized the construction of infrastructure, which will ultimately eradicate the hurdles associated with being a landlocked country. To that end, the Government has prioritized road construction and the maintenance of roads and buildings, civil aviation, sustainable energy, research and technology development, safe water supply and sanitation, water-resource development, housing and human settlements, communications, the environment, climate change and disaster management. Those priorities of the Government of Swaziland link to goals 7 and 10 of Agenda 2063 and SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 15.

Furthermore, the country will increase its rail network from 300 to 429 kilometres, as well as establish a rail-safety regulator, and will further explore the possibility of making rail transportation competitive with road transport.

The Kingdom of eSwatini will continue with the implementations of such programmes, as they are key to our development agenda.

We have also made significant improvements in a variety of sectors, but other challenges are reversing the gains we have made in past years, particularly with the issues of HIV/AIDS and climate change, which are among the plethora of challenges that we face as a developing nation.

The Kingdom is committed to addressing the scourge of climate change. The country fully participated in all the negotiations that culminated in the adoption and subsequent signing of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The negative impact of climate change has become a thorn in the side of the eSwatini economy. It has depleted our limited financial resources, killed an alarming number of our livestock and destroyed most of our ecosystems. The drought has led to a serious reduction in the water supply, which is required for crop production, human use and consumption, the sustenance of remaining livestock and for slowing or stopping the disappearance of ecosystems. The drought has exacerbated food and nutrition insecurity for many of our people, not only in the Kingdom but throughout the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region and across the entire African continent. A high proportion of our economic activity is agro-based. Therefore, the country has continued to feel the harsh effects of climate change at the levels of subsistence farming and commercial agriculture. It is against that backdrop that the Government of the Kingdom of eSwatini declared the drought a national disaster.

Integration has become a universal subject that transcends all aspects of life. It has been proved that any development achieved by individual countries is the result of their citizens having deliberately worked together as a collective entity. That is also true with the United Nations family, where the basis of all our success is togetherness and unity in diversity. We have to come together — in our different sizes and with our diverse cultures, traditions, economies and political and social inclinations — to cooperate and become a formidable family ready to address any challenge and achieve any objective we set for ourselves.

Integration has succeeded in helping nations work together for common objectives as regions and continents and as the global community. Many countries have succeeded in developing their economies by collectively observing common regional rules in order to promote a regional agenda. Countries have agreed to open their markets in order to facilitate a high degree of economic activity, which, inter alia, boosts trade and creates jobs. Peaceful societies have been created through integration, which is one of the key ingredients that propels the push to transform our world.

The Kingdom of eSwatini has continued to be an important and active player in promoting regional and continental integration, particularly in the economic sphere. We are a member of several integration arrangements at the regional level in southern and eastern Africa, as well as at the continental level.

Last month, the Kingdom of eSwatini hosted the thirty-sixth SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government. The theme of the Summit was "Resource Mobilization for Investment in Sustainable Energy Infrastructure for an Inclusive SADC Industrialization

for the Prosperity of the Region". That theme is congruous with the theme of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly and is a building-block that augments the push to transform our world at the regional level. The Kingdom of eSwatini has been given the task of leading the SADC for one calendar year, which we accepted with dignity and humility.

The SADC Summit theme is in line with all of the Sustainable Development Goals, but most particularly with Goal 7, which is to "ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all", Goal 9, which is to "build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation", and Goal 8, which is to "promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all".

The Kingdom of eSwatini is also party to a number of trade integration arrangements, including the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the Tripartite Free Trade Area, the ongoing negotiations of the Continental Africa Free Trade Area and the Economic Partnership Agreements. Those trade agreements have opened up preferential market access opportunities for our country to maximize its trade at the regional and international levels. Those trade arrangements are also expected to boost the production capacity of countries in the region and add value to primary products, which will lead to industrialization, job creation and, subsequently, poverty reduction. In other words, regional cooperation and integration work to reinforce the implementation of the SDGs and the push to transform our world.

One of the key elements to facilitate the successful implementation of the SDGs involves consultation. Since time immemorial, the Kingdom of Swaziland has infused consultation into its way of life. It is a process that is appreciated, accepted and embraced by every member of the general populace at all levels. It is a forum made available to all citizens of the country where they may literally contribute to the way we address all economic, social, political and environmental issues that arise. The Kingdom's consultation process is unique. Simple and transparent, it accommodates people of all ages, genders, social status, educational backgrounds and political inclinations.

It was only last month that the nation convened for days at the Ludzidzini Royal Residence to discuss issues of national significance. We call that gathering the Sibaya, or the People's Parliament. It is a national consultation process that affords every Swazi citizen an opportunity to contribute to the development of the country. Such an inclusive process serves as a springboard for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and provides a push to transforming our Kingdom, and by extension, our world, in a peaceful manner.

The conflict in Syria continues to be a great cause for concern for us all. We call upon all parties involved to immediately find an amicable solution to the impasse. Many lives have been lost, and thousands of Syrians have become refugees in many parts of the world. We therefore urge the United Nations to address the problem in order to create suitable living conditions for the people of Syria. We furthermore urge those entrusted with the responsibility of bringing about peace in Syria not to fight with one another. They should instead concentrate their efforts on restoring peace in the country. They should also speak in one voice and adopt a tone and strategy that gives hope to the Syrians, who desperately need peace.

The Kingdom of eSwatini would like to emphasize that the push to transform our world will not be effective or adequate if some individuals, communities, countries, regions or continents are left behind. We must never forget that every individual has a part to play in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and, subsequently, in the push to transform our world. That means that there is a need for universal partnerships at all stages and levels throughout the world. That inclusiveness should also be extended to Member State representation in all bodies of the United Nations.

According to the Charter of the United Nations, the Organization's mission is to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small. Accordingly, the 23 million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan should enjoy the same fundamental rights as any other people. Taiwan is mostly unable to attend the meetings and activities of United Nations specialized agencies. Thus the welfare of its people and, by extension, all humankind, is adversely affected. There is no doubt that their membership will add value to the family's universal push to transform our world.

By the same token, my delegation reiterates and maintains its call for Africa's voice to be heard loud and clear in the Security Council. This appeal has been on the agenda for the past 15 years and has been specifically articulated in the 2005 Ezulwini Consensus adopted by the African Union Heads of State and Government. My delegation believes that the permanent representation of the African continent in that United Nations organ can contribute tremendously to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and to the universal push to transform our world.

Finally, once again, we wish the United Nations a prosperous future as it addresses the multiple challenges that we are faced with in many parts of the world.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Samiuela 'Akilisi Pohiva, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Minister for Education and Training of the Kingdom of Tonga

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Minister for Education and Training of the Kingdom of Tonga.

Mr. Samiuela 'Akilisi Pohiva, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Minister for Education and Training of the Kingdom of Tonga, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Samiuela 'Akilisi Pohiva, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Minister for Education and Training of the Kingdom of Tonga, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Pohiva (Tonga): At the outset, allow me to echo the sentiments of the many Heads of State, Government and delegation before me in congratulating Mr. Thomson on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. We are particularly humbled, yet proud, that a son of Fiji, indeed a son of our Pacific islands, has reached the historic milestone of being chosen by the Member States of this institution to be their President. He can expect the full cooperation and support of the delegation of the Kingdom of Tonga. May I also add my voice to the cause of previous speakers in thanking his immediate predecessor, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for his outstanding leadership of the General Assembly at its seventieth session.

We welcome the President's timely and relevant choice of theme for this session. The focus of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — and of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development itself — is, as the theme aptly states, to transform our world and to ensure that no one is left behind. As we delve deeper into the implementation of the Agenda over the next years towards 2030, the transformation of our world, in line with the SDGs, can be accomplished, as the theme states, only through a universal push. That means that all countries and all actors must work together at national, regional and international levels in order to successfully implement the Agenda and achieve our targets.

An important gauge of that success is the extent of a country's internalization of the lofty Goals and targets that have been set. In November 2015, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Tonga began incorporating the SDGs in its domestic legislation by aligning its national strategic development framework with them. The SDGs are now an integral part of the Government's corporate-planning and budgeting clauses.

The health of our people is a top priority for Tonga. Indeed, we risk losing the most important natural resource that Tonga has to develop our country if the people fall prey to the dangers of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). In recognition thereof, and in partnership with the Pacific Community and the World Health Organization, Tonga hosted the first regional summit on non-commuicable diseases in June of this year in order to highlight the rampant spread of these diseases throughout the Kingdom and the Pacific island region and to consider action to address the regional NCD crisis. We were privileged to have as a guest of honour UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, whose attendance at the summit was a first for her in her current role, and which indicated the importance that the UNDP, in partnership with Tonga and the region, attaches to that health topic. As one of the leading countries highlighted by the NCDs Joint Programming Missions programme and the United

Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of NCDs, at a side event this week, Tonga was recognized at the international level for its integrated national efforts to address NCDs.

Related to the important issue of health is the onslaught of transnational crime in our country. With porous borders, drugs have managed to enter Tonga through the illicit movement of people and goods. Although our country is very small in terms of capital in comparison with our neighbouring countries, Tonga has seen the effect of the drugs trade on the health and well-being of our people, particularly our young people, which is putting the future of our country at risk. We support the regional initiatives of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to combat the trafficking in drugs and precursors, among other things, and organized crime in the Pacific.

As a small island developing State — in other words, a sea-locked developing country — our traditional and modern relationship with the ocean places the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and its natural resources at the forefront of our interests. Tonga joined the ranks of Member States that argued for the importance of the ocean and seas to global sustainable development and gradually steered the negotiations on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to the inclusion of SDG 14, on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources in the Agenda.

We are now greatly committed to ensuring that SDG 14, together with its set targets and indicators, is achieved by 2030. We therefore very much look forward to the first United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, to be held in June 2017, as the first global meeting to take stock of where we stand in terms of the conservation and sustainable use of our oceans and its resources and where we need to go to ensure that all targets are achieved. We thank our friends Fiji and Sweden for paving the way for the holding of that international conference. The Assembly can rest assured that Tonga will be highly engaged in that process.

We also commend Italy for its 10x20 Initiative in line with SDG target 14.5, which seeks to set aside 10 per cent of our coastal waters as marine protected areas by 2020. We look forward to engaging with and supporting the work of the Steering Committee in that regard, under the able guidance of the co-Chairs, Italy and Maldives.

Tonga continues to recognize the importance of the work of the International Seabed Authority (ISA). Tonga engages in the Authority's processes to ensure that the appropriate conservation and environmental-management practices are sufficiently robust in terms of seabed mining. We thank the Member States that supported Tonga in its election to the Council of the Authority in 2014 and, earlier this year, to the Council's Legal and Technical Commission. In reiterating our support for the good work of the ISA Assembly, we look forward to assisting the Authority in managing the upcoming challenges as the onset of seabed mining in the Area comes to the fore. We also congratulate the ISA Secretary-General-elect, Mr. Michael Lodge, and look forward to his stewardship of the Authority in the coming years.

The regulation of the exportation of biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdictions has yet to be realized. In line with the decision of the leaders of the Pacific Island Forum in 2014, we strongly support the ongoing Preparatory Committee meetings process established under the resolution 69/292, of 19 June 2015, which will make substantive recommendations at the seventy-second session of the General Assembly for a legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

We commend the leadership of the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, Ambassador Eden Charles of Trinidad and Tobago, and look forward to his continued stewardship and skilful guidance of the process towards its completion through the final two Preparatory Committee meetings next year. The draft agreement recognizes the value and importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity.

By partnering with friends, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Tonga is able to face the challenges of climate change, while remaining fully aware that as a Government it cannot face such challenges alone. One of those challenges is the existential threat posed by climate change to international peace and security. To ensure that the issue of negative impacts of climate change is high on the United Nations agenda, we reiterate our call for a Special Representative on climate and security and for the issue to be raised by

our friends in the Security Council, due to its clear and unambiguous links to additional threats to international peace and security. Be it in terms of sea-level rise, loss of territory, mass migration or as an instigator of violence and the suffering of peoples as a result of the scarcity of resources, the causal link is clear.

Tonga is the third-most-vulnerable country in the world to the adverse impacts of climate change. As a signatory party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its subsequent Protocol, Tonga affirms its ongoing commitment to implementing the objectives of this core international framework on climate change. The seriousness of the negative impacts of climate change cannot be underestimated. Its impacts threaten our territorial integrity, land, water, health, infrastructure, food security, biological diversity, livelihoods and ecosystems.

The maintenance of international peace and security is determined not solely, but in a major way, by the issue of disarmament. The proliferation of weapons in all their forms not only threatens international peace and security, it also demonstrates the sheer waste of financial resources when Governments invest in the manufacture and trade in arms. Such finances could be better used for international sustainable development initiatives, which would logically contribute to international peace and security and the betterment of lives. The spending of trillions of dollars in defence budgets to develop weapons, including nuclear weapons, at the expense of the welfare of one's people, is offensive and repugnant to the conscience of humankind.

In keeping with that sentiment, we wish to express our concern about the recent nuclear testing by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in breach of decisions made by the United Nations to promote international peace and security. Our Pacific islands and region having experienced the negative effects of nuclear testing, Tonga believes in the need for international standards to control and manage the use of nuclear capabilities and nuclear power for peaceful purposes. For its part, Tonga is at the final stage of its acceptance process of the statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency, which will formalize its membership of the organization. We hope to deposit our instrument of acceptance with the Agency by the end of this month.

Part of the challenge of ensuring the credible development of all States lies in preventing one country from dominating another country economically. This matter bears directly on the right to development, an issue that we discussed last Thursday morning at the high-level segment to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development. The unfair application of such dominance results in the suffering of innocent people and, in the light of political reasoning, should not be tolerated in this day and age. We therefore join many others in congratulating the Government of the United State on incrementally easing its restrictions on economic activity in Cuba. Tonga has an interest in that, given our concern for the welfare of our nationals currently living and studying in Cuba, and also for the millions of people who merely want an opportunity to enjoy the right to development. We will again join the majority of States represented here this year in calling on the United States for a timely lifting of its embargo on Cuba.

We want to address the welfare of the Pacific people who are residents and citizens of West Papua province, Indonesia. Last year, standing on this same rostrum (see A/70/PV.18), I spoke about the human rights abuses taking place in Indonesian-ruled West Papua. Nothing appears to have changed there in the year that has elapsed. I use the word "appears" intentionally, because we still have no way of knowing exactly what is going on there. It seems that something is definitely wrong.

Nearly half a century ago, when I was still young, I learned, as had many others in the region, that a wrong had been done to the West Papuans. I am not a young man now. During much of my life I have struggled, against great odds for justice and democracy in my land. In the Christian faith, a universal truism is espoused through the story of the Good Samaritan. A badly injured man lay in the sun by the roadside. He had been stripped of his clothing and was evidently the victim of a robbery. Without any reservation or hesitation, free from religious and cultural restrictions or bias, the Good Samaritan went to help the man, relieve his suffering, clothe him and nurse him back to health. The man was placed by the Good Samaritan in local accommodation where he could recover.

The Tongolese probably have the same neighbourly concern for the welfare of the indigenous people of West Papua. As called for by a decision taken at a meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum earlier this month in the Federated States of Micronesia, Tonga supports the goal

for an open and constructive dialogue with Indonesia with regard to the status and welfare of the people of West Papua. Tonga therefore calls on Indonesia, as a dialogue partner of the Pacific Islands Forum, to work with it and other Forum countries to facilitate this decision of our fellow leaders, either bilaterally or through United Nations mechanisms.

Finally, we reiterate our support for the President and his presidency. We also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Secretary-General for his tireless work on behalf of all countries and peoples, and more especially for his sensitivity to the interests of small island developing States like my own, for which he has promoted specific initiatives. His presence here will surely be missed. We hope that his successor will carry forward his work on behalf of small island developing States. We wish him well in his future endeavours.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Minister for Education and Training of the Kingdom of Tonga, for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Samiuela 'Akilisi Pohiva, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Minister for Education and Training of the Kingdom of Tonga, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

Mr. Pham Binh Minh (Viet Nam): I congratulate Mr. Peter Thomson on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. I am confident that his wisdom, leadership and experience will guide our session to success. Allow me also to thank Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President at the seventieth session, for his important contributions to the work of the Assembly. My special gratitude extends to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his leadership, commitment, tireless efforts and tremendous contributions during his ten years at the helm of the Organization.

Last year, 2015, we established a common vision for the world we live in. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction not only seek to address short-term challenges, but also to present a vision for greater partnership for people, the planet, peace and prosperity. The theme chosen for this session, "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world", is therefore very opportune as we embark upon realizing our vision and turning our commitments into concrete results for our people.

I believe that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is within our grasp. Our people, our children and grandchildren, expect us to deliver on our commitments. The implementation of the Millennium Development Goals has laid a solid foundation. Opportunities are plenty. Reform, innovation, creativity and economic restructuring are setting countries on a path to prosperity. The internationalization of production is making possible global and regional cooperation and integration for sustainable development. New advances in science and technology are paving the way for the fourth Industrial Revolution, which promises to bring humanity to a new, higher level of development.

But challenges are by no means few. Developing countries in particular continue to suffer from the weak global economic recovery, rising protectionism in major economies, climate change, natural disasters and epidemics. Food and water security, the depletion of natural resources, and the humanitarian and migration crises also have negative and far-reaching implications for many countries and regions. Development and income gaps are widening at the national, regional and global levels. The instability and tension, violence, conflicts, terrorism and violent extremism that are plaguing many regions are of particular concern. Power politics and the use, or threat of use, of force in international relations continue to be a threat to international peace and security.

That is the reality of our world today, and it compels us to work together to promote multilateralism and adherence to international law for peace, cooperation and sustainable development. As has been demonstrated, multilateral cooperation has a growing role to play in international relations. We are seeing multilateral institutions expand, both in numbers and in strength. Multi-tiered cooperation and integration are taking shape. Multilateral solutions to common challenges prove to be the most effective and long-lasting, since no country, large or small, rich or poor, can afford to address those challenges alone. Multilateral institutions are also venues for countries to promote their interests,

effectively manage disputes and differences and expand their development opportunities.

That is why Viet Nam believes that multilateralism must be strengthened and the operation of multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations, must be improved. The United Nations has an indispensable role to play by coordinating international responses to global challenges and facilitating development cooperation. No other organization is better at fostering partnerships and assisting countries to successfully implement the SDGs.

Accordingly, to ensure greater equality, democracy and transparency, the United Nations, including the Security Council, must undergo reform. The United Nations development system must have better resources and be more effective and efficient. We must ensure the broadest participation of all countries in discussions and formulations of resolutions and decisions, so that no country will be left behind.

International law remains the linchpin of a stable international security architecture and a strong multilateral system. Unfortunately, the role of the fundamental norms and principles of international law is underestimated. Unfair demands, unilateralism, power politics and the use of force to address international security and political issues have been creating tensions and confrontation, hindering efforts to peacefully settle disputes and conflicts.

This is where the United Nations can and must play a stronger part. The Organization must take the lead in promoting adherence to international law and the Charter of the United Nations as the foundation for international peace and security. No country, big or small, can be exempt from the law. The United Nations should also work to strengthen preventive diplomacy and the peaceful settlement of disputes, utilizing all tools, as provided in Article 33 of the Charter.

Above all, I believe that each country should align its national interests with those of humankind and immerse itself in the community of nations. A policy of humanity, peace and friendship will enable us to eliminate hatred, narrow gaps, manage differences and open up opportunities to find lasting solutions to all disputes and conflicts. Having suffered from decades of war, Viet Nam treasures peace and will spare no effort to maintain or achieve peace. We believe lasting peace can be secured only by long-term vision and a comprehensive and inclusive approach that harmonizes the interests of all stakeholders. We welcome recent positive developments in the relations between Cuba and the United States and support resolutions on ending the economic embargo against Cuba.

Multilateralism, international law, peace, cooperation and development are the key elements for building a peaceful, stable and prosperous Asia-Pacific region. Regional countries are working to promote initiatives for political, economic, social and cultural cooperation and integration, including new-generation free trade areas. However, the Asia-Pacific region contains risks of conflict, especially on the Korean peninsula and in the South China Sea — all and any of which can threaten regional and international peace, security and prosperity. With regard to certain recent complicated developments in the South China Sea, we call upon all parties concerned to exercise self-restraint and solve disputes by peaceful means in accordance with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, fully respect diplomatic and legal processes, implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and expedite the completion of the code of conduct for the South China Sea.

Viet Nam is strongly committed to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A plan of action for the implementation of the SDGs has been developed, and we are working with United Nations agencies to craft the strategic plan 2017-2021, as part of the Delivering as One initiative, to assist Viet Nam in the implementation of the SDGs. For us, implementing the SDGs is part of and also encompasses our efforts to restructure the economy and transform the growth model, develop sustainable infrastructure, ensure social justice, address inequalities and protect the environment. As one of the countries predicted to be hardest hit by climate change and sea-level rise, Viet Nam is expediting procedures for the early ratification of the Paris Agreement and is planning its implementation.

Experience has shown that success comes only when we take our development into our own hands. To transform the world, we must start with transforming ourselves and leave no one behind. Viet Nam believes it essential to bring its domestic resources into full play and mainstream sustainability into our development vision, strategies and policies, with the people at the centre. We also believe that we can succeed only with stronger global partnerships, in which the United

Nations plays the convening and coordinating role. Viet Nam calls on developed countries to uphold their responsibility to take the lead in assisting developing countries, including Viet Nam, to realize the SDGs, especially in financing, capacity-building, technology transfer and trade facilitation.

As a peace-loving and friendly nation, Viet Nam always pursues the foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, peace, cooperation and development. We strive to be a friend, a reliable partner and a responsible member of the international community. Our commitment to multilateralism and international law is unwavering, and we will spare no effort to contribute to peace, cooperation and development.

Viet Nam has decided to present its candidacy for non-permanent membership of the Security Council for the term 2020-2021 and will continue to increase its participation in the United Nations peacekeeping operations. Viet Nam looks forward to stronger partnership and collaboration with the United Nations and Member States to realize the vision of transforming our world and ensuring a better future.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Moualem (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate Mr. Peter Thomson and his friendly country, Fiji, on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. I wish him every success during his presidency, which he has promised would be one for the whole Assembly. Such a promise, if kept, would strengthen the neutral role of the President of the General Assembly and shed a bright light on facts that some are trying to conceal.

As we meet once again, our world is going through a grave and dangerous period. Terrorism, which we have cautioned against repeatedly from this very rostrum, has continued to grow and gain ground, claiming the lives of more innocent people and causing death and destruction as it rages unabated across the world. The blood of Syrians was not enough to quench its thirst. It had to go after the citizens of many other countries, including those that have supported and sponsored it. These innocent people are now paying for the mistakes of their Governments, which have ignored the interests of their people and adopted short-sighted policies.

For more than five years, the Syrian people — no matter their affiliations — have paid dearly for the crimes of terrorists who have shed their blood and undermined their security, stability and livelihoods. Terrorism has spared no one, even targeting schools and universities, hospitals, places of worship and infrastructure. Everyone knows that terrorism would not have spread through my country if it had not been for the external support of certain countries. As is no longer a secret, these have included Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which have promoted their jihadist takfiri ideology and their death fatwas that have nothing to do with Islam. They have bragged about supporting terrorism in every way possible, sending into Syria thousands of mercenaries equipped with the most sophisticated weapons.

Meanwhile, Turkey has opened its border to admit tens of thousands of terrorists from around the world and has provided them with logistical support and training camps under the supervision of Turkish and Western intelligence. It has even supplied those terrorists with direct military support, as was the case in Idlib, Aleppo and rural Latakia. I would like to refer the Assembly to a study published seven months ago by a German institute, the Firil Center For Studies. According to that study, more than 360,000 foreign terrorists from 83 countries have entered Syria since April 2011. By the end of 2015, the Syrian Army was able to kill 95,000 of them, while 120,000 returned home or travelled to other countries.

In Syria, we are combating terrorism on behalf of the entire world. Every time the Syrian Army kills another foreign terrorist, it spares the lives of the innocent people who could have died in terrorist acts committed by that same terrorist upon his return to his native country. Anyone who tries to distort that fact must be held responsible for the spread of terrorism and the increasing numbers of victims. Our valiant Army deserves to be commended and supported. It must never be the target of schemes and lies.

The terrorist campaign against my country is taking place in the full view of a polarized world. There are those who have chosen to support international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, while others have decided to turn a blind eye to the truth and to support, finance and arm terrorists under false pretexts that depart from logic and reason. They choose, for example, to refer to those terrorists as moderate armed opposition, even though there is

irrefutable evidence that the groups have committed against Syrians crimes and massacres that are no less barbaric than those of Da'esh or Al-Qaida. Some consider people who take up arms against the State and its citizens legitimate opposition as long as they are located in Syria, while the same people, on any other day and in another country, would be considered terrorists, or at least outlaws.

These facts notwithstanding, all Syrians — the people, the Army and the Government — will not relent in their fight against terrorism. They are more determined than ever before to eliminate terrorism wherever it exists in their country and to rebuild a better Syria, because they are well aware that their homeland will cease to exist if the terrorists and their backers emerge victorious. Our belief in victory is even greater now that the Syrian Army is making considerable strides in its war against terrorism, with the support of the true friends of the Syrian people, notably the Russian Federation, Iran and the Lebanese national resistance. Such support has helped to strengthen the resilience of Syrians and to alleviate their suffering. We truly hope that other countries will soon wake up and realize, before it is too late, the danger that threatens us all.

We have always welcomed all international efforts to counter terrorism in Syria, but we stress once again the need to coordinate such efforts with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Syrian Arab Army that has been combating terrorism on the ground for more than five years. Without such coordination, any action would be considered a breach of sovereignty, a flagrant interference and a violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter. Without such coordination, any action will fall short of achieving real results and will even make matters worse.

In that regard, the Syrian Government condemns in the strongest possible terms the attack launched by American warplanes on a Syrian Army site in the vicinity of the Deir ez-Zor airport on 17 September. That attack allowed ISIL to gain control of the site. The Syrian Government holds the United States fully responsible for that aggression, because facts show that it was an intentional attack, and not an error, even if the United States claims otherwise. This cowardly aggression clearly proves that the United States and its allies are complicit with Da'esh and other terrorist armed organizations.

We also reiterate our condemnation of the Turkish incursion into Syrian territories under the pretext of countering terrorism. That flagrant aggression must be stopped immediately. Terrorism cannot be fought by replacing one terrorist organization with another. One cannot but wonder how a State that has been the main entry point for terrorists and weapons into Syria can claim to be fighting terrorism. How can there be genuine and effective international counter-terrorism cooperation while relevant Security Council resolutions remain dead letters?

Since the onset of the crisis in 2011, the Syrian Government has declared that any solution must follow two parallel tracks: a counter-terrorism track, and a political track through an intra-Syrian dialogue that allows Syrians to determine the future of their country without foreign interference. All solutions dictated from the outside are categorically rejected by the Syrian people. Likewise, no political solution will succeed unless the necessary foundations and conditions for its implementation have been laid, including intensified counter-terrorism efforts and progress in the national reconciliation process — a strategy which has proved successful in a number of areas around Syria.

Despite all the hurdles created by the regional and Western States that have sided with the self-proclaimed Syrian opposition, we have always been open to a political track that would stem the bloodshed and end the prolonged suffering of Syrians. We reiterate our commitment to moving forward on the Geneva track, under the auspices of the United Nations. We recall our constructive position with regard to the political solution. Such a solution must be based on respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and the unity of its people. It should begin by establishing a government of national unity comprising representatives from the Government and the opposition, in all its factions, and tasked with establishing a constitution-drafting committee. Once the new Constitution had been approved by Syrians through a referendum, parliamentary elections would follow and the new Government would be formed under the new Constitution.

It is truly regrettable that some are exploiting the humanitarian tragedy and suffering of Syrians, especially in terrorist-held areas, and politicizing such suffering to achieve certain goals that have nothing to do with humanitarian principles or the interests of the Syrians themselves. Some countries continue to shed

crocodile tears over the situation of the Syrians in some areas, accusing the Syrian Government of employing a policy of sieges and starvation. At the same time, the same countries continue to support and arm the terrorists who are besieging civilians in the same areas, from the inside, using them as human shields and preventing the delivery of or confiscating humanitarian aid.

Make no mistake — no one is more committed than the Syrian Government to ending the suffering of the Syrian people and providing them with a life of dignity, wherever they may be and without exception. That is a duty and not a favour. We will spare no effort to that end, including in cooperation with the United Nations, despite all the difficulties that we are facing as a result of the systematic destruction by externally supported terrorist organizations, and despite the unilateral coercive economic and financial measures imposed on the Syrian people by the very parties that falsely claim to have the interests of the Syrian people in mind. Such unilateral measures have adversely affected many vital sectors, including health care, education and energy.

Today, while Syria is confronting mercenary terrorists on its territory, it has long confronted a different kind of terrorism — the terrorism of Israel, which has occupied a precious part of its land in the Syrian Golan since 4 June 1967. Our Syrian Arab people in the occupied Golan continue to suffer as a result of Israel's oppressive and aggressive practices. Those practices are no longer confined to the occupied Golan but are currently affecting the security and life of Syrians in the southern part of the country. Israel is directly intervening militarily to assist the terrorist organizations operating in the area in every way. Syria calls on the international community to put an effective end to all such practices and compel Israel to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolution 497 (1981) on the occupied Syrian Golan.

The United Nations should also compel Israel to allow the Palestinian people to enjoy their inalienable rights, including the establishment of their own independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the return of Palestinian refugees to their land, in accordance with internationally recognized resolutions.

Syria reaffirms that Israel's aggressive policies threaten not only Syria, but the region in general, especially given Israel's nuclear arsenal. We have stressed time and again the need to compel Israel to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and other treaties on weapons of mass destructon (WMDs) and to subject its nuclear installations to the oversight of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Syria stresses the right of States to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. We have always called for creating a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. In fact, we have efficiently and responsibly eliminated all chemical weapons in Syria, in cooperation with the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations. In that regard, Syria reiterates its readiness to continue its cooperation with the Joint Investigative Mechanism, as well as to continue the relevant Syrian investigations.

We congratulate Cuba and Iran on reaching agreements to lift the embargoes imposed on them, and we look forward to their implementation. We renew our call for removing the illegal economic measures imposed on the Syrian people and other independent peoples in the world, notably the peoples of the Democratic Republic of Korea, Venezuela and Belarus.

In closing, we wish Member States and their peoples lasting security and prosperity. We hope that our Organization will be able to regain public trust around the world by upholding the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, which calls for respecting the sovereignty and independence of Member States and ensuring non-interference in their internal affairs. That principle, if implemented, would lay the foundations for genuine and fair relations among nations after the greed and arrogance of some have shaken them to their core.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs of Malaysia.

Mr. Hamidi (Malaysia): Allow me at the outset to congratulate His Excellency Peter Thomson on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. I also wish to express my delegation's deepest appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the General Assembly at its seventieth session, for his leadership and able stewardship.

Malaysia is committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For Malaysia, the nation's development agenda has always been people-centred, which runs parallel to the aspirations of the SDGs. I

am pleased to state here that Malaysia has set in motion initiatives and actions to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Our current five-year development plan — the eleventh Malaysia plan, covering the period from 2016 to 2020 — was formulated with people at the centre of all development efforts and with the theme "Anchoring growth on people".

The plan embraces three main principles: achieving high income, inclusiveness and sustainability. In many of its aspects, the plan mirrors the multidimensional nature of the 2030 Agenda. As the 2030 Agenda is implemented, the SDGs will be integrated into the national framework of the plan. Malaysia is also in the process of formulating a national SDG road map, establishing a broad-based and inclusive committee to oversee the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs and strengthening the data requirements for them. That road map will serve as an overarching and guiding policy for Malaysia's sustainable development.

In the meantime, every effort is being made to ensure that the initiatives outlined in the eleventh Malaysia plan are duly implemented. They include a technical and vocational education training (TVET) component. By providing essential skills through TVET programmes, we are not only preparing the youth for the labour market, but also preparing human capital for nation-building. Graduates of our TVET programmes, which involve cooperation between the National Youth Skills Institute and various multinational companies, have a 90 per cent employability rate.

Next, I want to talk about our very own magic, or Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre (MaGIC), which will work to make Malaysia the startup capital of Asia. Our mission is to catalyse the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Malaysia by bringing together the abundant resources of partners and communities alike in order to develop entrepreneurs that will start enduring and high-growth companies, thereby exerting a positive impact at the regional and global levels. MaGIC, which is located in Cyberjaya, Malaysia, was jointly launched by the President of the United States of America, Mr. Barack Obama, and our Prime Minister, Mr. Najib Tun Razak, in April 2014. On that memorable day, MaGIC signed a memorandum of understanding with UP Global to further foster and develop a vibrant ecosystem for startup companies in Malaysia and beyond.

In Malaysia, we no longer work in silos. We have moved into a new working environment that we call the "blue ocean" and have bid farewell to the archaic "red ocean". We have introduced a unique national development strategy based on creativity and innovation known as the National Blue Ocean Strategy (NBOS). It is a strategy in which over 80 ministries and agencies — from the police and military, to women, youth and higher education organizations — are collaborating to formulate and execute creative NBOS initiatives that are transforming the country. The unique Strategy also involves public and private partnership. NBOS gave birth to our unique urban transformation centres and rural transformation centres. One only needs to go to either centre for all Government services.

Malaysia is also no stranger in the area of volunteerism. I am referring to our very own organization of Malaysian-based Hospitals Beyond Boundaries (HBB), as well as to other voluntary organizations and non-governmental organizations. HBB is a non-profit organization that is committed to providing accessible health care through community-run clinics in underprivileged communities in Cambodia and Malaysia. HBB is led by a recipient of the United Nations Young Leader Award, Dr. Mohd Lutfi Fadil Lokman, who was selected under SDG 3, "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages".

We have heard testimonies from various small island developing States on the devastating impact of climate change on their countries and populations and the existential threat it presents to their subsistence. We have seen an increase in the frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters, such as floods, coastal erosion and landslides, in many other countries across the globe.

Such extreme weather events have affected economic activities and the livelihoods and safety of people. If left unchecked, I am afraid climate change could, in fact, constitute the greatest threat multiplier for global security. Realizing the increasingly urgent need to address the impact of climate change, we came together in Paris last December and took the historic step of adopting the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We must now follow through and carry out the commitments assumed thereunder. Malaysia is committed to reducing the intensity of greenhouse gas emissions of its gross domestic product by up to 45 per

cent by 2030. Malaysia is currently working towards its ratification of the Paris Agreement.

An international environment that enables peace and security is also important for the successful implementation of the SDGs. Yet we are witnessing various conflicts in several parts of the world. The rise in the phenomenon of non-State actors such as Da'esh, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab has caused the instability and insecurity of nations. The international community continues to witness horrific acts of cruelty by these non-State actors. They employ terror tactics and extremism as ways of spreading their influence and reach.

The fight against terrorism cannot be won through force or punitive measures alone. Malaysia has established deradicalization and rehabilitation programmes that are oriented towards changing the mindsets of radicalized extremist individuals. The programmes are complemented by various forms of humanitarian assistance to facilitate the reintegration of those individuals into society. Such measures are important to avoid relapse. The success rate of our deradicalization programme thus far is around 97.5 per cent. Malaysia has come up with a deradicalization module and a standard operation procedure, which we stand ready to share with other nations.

No nation is immune to the threat of international terrorism. Hence, there is an urgent need to address terrorism comprehensively. We need to counter it from an ideological perspective by addressing the narratives and root causes of terrorism and exploring how they could be used to attract people into supporting terrorist groups. We need to explore new solutions and continuously work to enhance our domestic legal framework in the fight against violent extremism. The continuous efforts should involve a diverse cross section of our population. We should enhance our interactions by winning the hearts and minds of religious leaders, women and our youth. We should build networks at all levels of society where they can help by providing counter-narratives and counter-messaging through community-based efforts — the arts, media, sports, and culture.

Today, we are still grappling with the problem of determining and identifying the root causes of terrorism. Many people speculate that those root causes could be poverty, deprivation, alienation, suppression or any of myriad other factors. Malaysia therefore joins others in calling for robust and effective international action in our collective fight against terrorism. Such action must be based on full respect for the Charter of the United Nations and for universally recognized principles of law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Only if and when the international community stands united can the terrorists be defeated.

Seven decades after the inception of the United Nations, the question of Palestine remains unresolved. The protracted crisis highlights the inherent flaws in the workings of the United Nations, where the use of the veto continues to perpetuate the longest occupation in modern history. Over the years, the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory is slowly but surely moving away from a two-State solution. The blockade on Gaza by the occupying Power, the unrelenting expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, the continued construction of illegal walls, the forced transfer of Palestinians from their homes and the gross violations of their human rights continue unabated despite mounting international pressure and criticism.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the lingering problem pertaining to the resettlement of existing refugee populations in host countries to third countries. Lengthy delays in the resettlement of refugees inevitably result in economic, social, political and security hardships for the host country. We therefore urge the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration and the States parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its related Protocol to address this matter and act promptly on it. While we are cognizant of the elements contained in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1), we emphasize that no initiative should place a State that is not a signatory to the relevant international instruments in a position that is inconsistent with the provisions of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

Malaysia's robust, rapid development and economic growth have attracted people throughout our region, by both legal and illegal means, who seek better living conditions and greater employment opportunities. These are the main drivers of migration within the South-East Asia region. Malaysia recognizes the contributions of the foreign workers to its economic prosperity and considers it equally important to protect their safety and welfare. Accordingly, the Government of Malaysia

pays attention to cases involving labour exploitation, including forced labour, and the definition of trafficking in persons under the Malaysian Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007 has been broadened to include labour exploitation. This is in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which requires immediate and stern measures to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking. Malaysia works in concert with the international community to tackle and eliminate those heinous crimes, which have caused grave injustice as well as untold suffering.

Malaysia joins the other Member States in expressing its profound gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon for his able leadership as Secretary-General of the world body since 2007. It is our fervent hope that the incoming Secretary-General will have strong leadership traits, a transformative vision of the United Nations, in particular the reform of the Security Council, and the ability to address the present and emerging challenges that threaten international peace, security, development and human rights.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Pasquale Valentini, Minister for Foreign and Political Affairs of the Republic of San Marino.

Mr. Valentini (San Marino) (*spoke in Italian; English text provided by the delegation*): On behalf of the Government of San Marino, I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson on his election as President of the General Assembly at the seventy-first session. We wish him a fruitful session, and the San Marino delegation assures the President of its full cooperation throughout the work of the General Assembly. I would also like to express my country's gratitude to the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for the work he did during the seventieth session.

At the end of the last year of his second term as Secretary-General, my country extends its special thanks to His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-Moon for the energy and determination with which he has led the United Nations, and for the sensitivity he has shown towards all Member States without distinction.

The theme chosen for this session, "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world", offers an interesting opportunity to make a constructive contribution to the work of the Assembly. The United Nations today faces challenges whose level of complexity and degree of interrelatedness are unparalleled in its history. The Organization must adapt quickly to new global challenges but also to the new opportunities offered by globalization in order to be more effective in carrying out its mandate. At the same time, the very complexity of these global challenges, which cannot be solved by any single State alone, unequivocally reaffirms the value and central role of the United Nations as a forum for solving global problems. In this context, the determination shown by the Secretary-General in submitting a proposal to the Organization for adaptation and requesting similar adaptation from Member States must be highlighted. This is why many of the initiatives undertaken have yielded significant results during his mandate.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015 in the presence of many Heads of State and Government including Their Excellencies the Captains Regent of the Republic of San Marino was one of the most important moments in the history of the United Nations. This ambitious Agenda integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development — economic, social and environmental. As an expression of a strong political consensus on the approach to sustainable global and innovative development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines our future and the vision of the world we want to live in. The transformation process for a new model of sustainable development is now under way.

Our country appreciates the commitment shown by Member States to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions by 2020. Our country also attaches great importance to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and to the monitoring mechanism identified in the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The real challenge today lies in the firmness of our will to effectively implement this vision. This is the response that the peoples we represent in this forum expect from us: that our Organization fulfil its mandate of protecting the citizens of the world and that Member States resume their responsibilities without letting national interests prevail over the ideals of solidarity and respect for the universal rights of every human being. Any hesitation in doing so will inevitably exact a very heavy toll in terms of destruction and loss of human lives.

Over the past few years, we have unfortunately witnessed a series of events that constitute a very serious threat to international peace and security and

therefore are an obstacle to the complete fulfilment of our mandate. We are facing the persistence of wars that have caused an unprecedented global humanitarian crisis, an increase in terrorism and violent extremism, the tragedy of the large movements of migrants and refugees, and a rise in populism and intolerance.

The conflict in Syria, which has continued uninterrupted since March 2011, has already caused more than 270,000 deaths, of which over 13,000 are children and more than 8,000 women. In addition, hundreds of thousands of people have been wounded. Inevitably, the humanitarian situation in Syria has drastically deteriorated. Most of those who need primary care, in particular women and children, live in besieged areas that cannot be reached by humanitarian convoys.

In five years, the Syrian conflict has caused 4.8 million people to become refugees in neighbouring countries — hundreds of thousands in Europe — and 6.6 million displaced people inside Syria itself, out of a population of over 20 million people before the war. More than 130 million people worldwide need humanitarian assistance as a result of armed conflicts and natural disasters. In Syria, for example, more than 13 million people need humanitarian assistance because of the war. In Yemen, there are more than 20 million who require assistance.

The Republic of San Marino has always strongly condemned all violations of human rights and international humanitarian laws perpetrated in Syria by all parties to the conflict, without any distinction. These are violations that are unfortunately still occurring today as we gather to affirm our commitment to peace and security. San Marino supports the action of the Secretary-General in Syria through his Special Envoy and expresses its appreciation for the work carried out there.

San Marino is well aware of the extreme seriousness of the world situation and of the need for each international stakeholder to play its part. In recent months it has contributed concretely to addressing the present humanitarian emergency. Besides contributing financially to various international programmes, San Marino has joined the Humanitarian Corridors project promoted by the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy and the Waldensian Table, supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and has hosted some migrants in the Republic of San Marino — a small contribution from a micro-State with great determination.

It is therefore necessary to have a united approach that combines the long-term perspective embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a short-term focus that makes it possible for us to address the emergencies that are evident to all. This united approach can only result from a significant cultural change based on the awareness of belonging to one human family and recognizing, as a consequence, the culture of understanding and of peaceful coexistence among different peoples and cultures as the only way to face the challenges of globalization without excluding anyone. Indeed, working together is the only way to build a planet for all.

With a view to fulfilling that mandate, we wish to express our heartfelt thanks to the Secretary-General for having placed the protection and promotion of human rights at the core of his agenda. Today, we can say that this is a cross-cutting issue and that human rights are reflected in every action of the United Nations aimed at achieving peace, security, justice and sustainable development. Only once we fully recognize and share the sense of the inalienable value of the person, in whatever condition or stage of life, will the cultural and religious differences and the many traditions within our Organization be seen not as obstacles to possible solutions but rather as valuable resources that make it possible to harmonize the diverse interests of the international community. In this regard, promoting full respect for individuals is not just one of the many goals but, on the contrary, the foundation upon which all our actions must be based in order to eliminate poverty, share prosperity, offer decent work to all and, ultimately, protect our planet.

The work of the United Nations and its specialized agencies contributes to affirming the culture of respect for fundamental rights, mutual knowledge and understanding, tolerance and hospitality. This is the culture that we, the States Members of the United Nations, must strive to disseminate among our citizens, starting with our young people, because it is only by affirming those values that the objectives set out by our Organization will be achieved.

The Republic of San Marino, in accordance with its history and tradition of freedom and democracy, firmly believes in that mandate and will support any action

that helps strengthen the United Nations as it strives to fulfil it.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Aurelia Frick, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for Education and Minister for Cultural Affairs of the Principality of Liechtenstein.

Ms. Frick (Liechtenstein): The migration and refugee crises are at the heart of our debate these days, both here and back home. People around the world are on the move in unprecedented numbers. Some 65 million have been forcibly displaced in the last year. At the summit on Monday, we made an important collective statement that should shape our policies — migration should be a choice, not a necessity. The United Nations is the place to address the drivers of forced displacement.

Our second challenge to frame migration as a positive force. Migrants contribute to diversity and global wealth. They bring fresh skills and dynamism to their host countries. If they are integrated successfully, they enrich societies. A positive narrative on migration is not difficult to present. The facts speak for themselves, but many of us lack the ability — and often the courage — to speak truthfully about the facts. Exploiting fears in a search for short-term political gains is cynical. It is an unproductive game. We must do better than that.

Mass atrocities are one of the main drivers of displacement; one needs only to take a look at the tragic situation in Syria and the massive displacement it has caused. Preventing genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes will eliminate one of the main reasons why people are forced to flee their homes.The Security Council can enter a new phase of its history of engagement on these crimes, moving from shameful indifference to responsible action. One hundred and twelve States subscribe to the code of conduct on atrocity crimes of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group. It offers the opportunity to change the political culture in the Security Council so that failures such as the one in Syria can become a thing of the past, and so as to make a significant reduction of forced displacement a reality. It goes hand in hand with the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative, which we warmly welcome.

Armed conflicts also force people to flee, often in large numbers. Many conflicts can be prevented if competent diplomacy is decisive and timely. The world is looking to the Organization to mobilize, and too often it is disappointed. Getting serious about conflict prevention should be a priority for the next Secretary-General — with the necessary means provided by the Member States. But let us not forget that armed conflict is a violation of the Charter of the United Nations Charter in and of itself. For 70 years now, it has been illegal to engage in an armed conflict, except in narrowly defined circumstances. We now can also hold the most egregious perpetrators of illegal use of force responsible.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the most comprehensive blueprint for action we have ever agreed on — a pledge to our children and to all future generations. It is also an ambitious promise that we can keep only it if we work together with resolve and persistence. All 17 Goals are of equal importance and they are all connected. We will treat them as such in our implementation effort, but we will naturally also place special emphasis on the areas where we feel we can make a special contribution.

The rule of law, in particular, is a long-standing priority for Liechtenstein. Accountable institutions, access to justice for everyone and significant reduction of corruption — all these are key ingredients for sustainable development. Justice is credible and effective only if it is delivered in an even-handed manner. Only if it is clear that nobody is above the law can the law prevail. Ensuring accountability for the most serious crimes under international law is therefore crucial.

For almost 15 years now, the International Criminal Court has been the symbol of our pledge that even the most powerful are not above the law — that there will be no impunity for perpetrators of the worst crimes. We fully support the Court and are committed to helping to improve it.

We look forward to the extension of the Rome Statute, whereby the Court's jurisdiction will expand to include crimes of aggression and the most serious forms of the illegal use of force will be criminalized. This will be a historic step, marking the first time since the creation of the United Nations that an international tribunal will have such jurisdiction. The necessary number of States has ratified the relevant Kampala Amendments to the Rome Statute, and the activation of this ground-breaking regime is scheduled for 2017. I appeal to everyone to join the 32 States who have ratified these Amendments — and to do so soon.

The Court is the strongest symbol that impunity is no longer an option. At the same time, it is also not a solution to all problems. The Court's capacity to handle cases is limited, and there are still a significant number of States outside its jurisdiction. Among them are some that most warrant greater accountability, such as Syria. The crimes committed against its civilian population since 2011 are as atrocious as they are well-documented. The attack on the humanitarian convoy in Aleppo marks a new low. We understand that these atrocious crimes will be thoroughly investigated, as they should be. A peace process in a country must have a strong accountability dimension. That is the least we can provide after having failed the people of Syria for so long.

The 2030 Agenda also deals with one of the defining human rights crises of our times — human trafficking and modern slavery. Upon entering the United Nations from the North Lawn, one can see the monument erected to commemorate the victims of the transatlantic slave trade. That is a dignified, important reminder of a terrifying crime against humanity. But let us not be misled into believing that the scourge has been relegated to the past. Over 45 million people today live in conditions that qualify as modern slavery, which generates billions of dollars. Every single country in the world is affected by it and virtually no perpetrators are held accountable — even though slavery is outlawed universally.

Modern slavery is a complex phenomenon that affects all of us and should leave none of us indifferent. We all have a chance to make a difference as individual consumers and as policy-makers. Modern slavery is not only one of the biggest human rights scandals of our times; it is also one of the biggest illegal business models. Liechtenstein will focus its contribution on disrupting financial flows and using relevant data for criminal prosecutions — in short, on following the money. We will also work towards a greater involvement of international justice mechanisms in the cases where national judiciaries systematically fail.

I wish to pay tribute to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. We will remember him as a tireless advocate for the purposes and principles of the United Nations. We are thankful for his service.

Effective leadership is a key ingredient for the success of the Organization. We have therefore invested a great deal in the selection process of the next Secretary-General. We have achieved a new level of transparency, which is an important step forward. But we must be honest with ourselves; we have started at such a low level that there is still a lot of room for improvement. The opportunity to engage with declared candidates is welcome. It should also be a given. We now must ensure that the entire membership is consulted with respect to the appointment itself. We strongly believe in giving the next Secretary-General a single term of office. That would enhance the independence of the Office of the Secretary-General, as prior office-holders have confirmed.

Finally, it is my strong personal wish to finally see a woman lead the Organization — an Organization that has been such a trailblazer for gender equality. We do believe that the appointment should be merit-based. The best-qualified person available should be offered the job. I would be very happy if that person was a woman.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Charles Flanagan, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland.

Mr. Flanagan (Ireland): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address the General Assembly this afternoon on behalf of my country, Ireland. My address will be framed under the overall theme of migration, an issue which in itself is a huge challenge for the global community today, but also an issue that intersects with so many of the other challenges we continue to grapple with as a community of nations.

As I stand at this rostrum in the great city of New York, I am acutely aware of my own country's long experience — over several centuries — with emigration. Indeed, on the newly restored lawn just outside this building, a haunting bronze sculpture by acclaimed Irish sculptor John Behan, entitled *Arrival*, depicts a huddled group of Irish emigrants ready to disembark in New York after fleeing starvation and poverty in their native Ireland. Our own history as a people forms the enduring backdrop to our foreign policy agenda. That part of our past is unfortunately the tragic present for so many.

The origins of the migration crisis are complex and diffuse. Many migrants and refugees are fleeing conflict and violence; many others are fleeing poverty and deprivation. The vast scale and sustained nature of the movement is at times bewildering and threatens to overwhelm our rules-based migration systems. It confronts us with a wide array of problems to overcome

all at the same time: the harrowing violence in Syria, the barbarism of Da'esh, the collapse of order within Libya and the practices of ruthless people-smugglers. The continuous poverty and inequality in many parts of Africa is also a significant driver of the mass movement of people. These are challenges that no one country can resolve alone. These are challenges that must all be tackled at the same time. These are challenges that require the international community of nations to work in close cooperation to overcome them.

Ireland is responding to the migration crisis in a variety of ways. We have given priority to funding humanitarian relief. We have provided over €60 million in support of the Syrian people in the region, most of it through United Nations organizations. We have deployed ships from our naval service to the Mediterranean to assist with vital search-and-rescue missions. Ireland is participating in the European Union programme to resettle refugees fleeing conflict. Here, at United Nations Headquarters, Ireland has acted as a facilitator, together with Jordan, to deliver the agreement on the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1).

I wish to take this opportunity to commend Ireland's team at the United Nations, led by Ambassador David Donoghue, and our Jordanian colleagues, for their stalwart efforts over five months of negotiations among 193 Member States. Ireland accepted this leadership role at the United Nations because we know that no country can by itself resolve the vast challenges the world currently faces.

In my address, I wish to set out why I believe a multilateral approach is the only one that can work and why the United Nations must demonstrate its capacity to really deliver on solutions. I will set out how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — which the United Nations agreed one year ago following a successful facilitation process shared by Ireland and Kenya — have the capacity, when implemented, to address many of the root causes of migration, by ending poverty, reducing inequality and responding to climate change.

Ireland is seeking election to the Security Council in 2020. We believe that our values and principles and our steadfast commitment to the United Nations will enable us to make a valuable contribution if we are successful in that election. Today, I am asking for support from the nations that share these vital values.

Last year, the United Nations marked 70 years since its establishment. At that time, we in Ireland celebrated 60 years of active membership. On the occasion of that important anniversary, two things were clear: first, the global challenges confronting the United Nations were more complex than ever before, and secondly, the United Nations and the international community have the potential to respond to these challenges in a comprehensive way. We demonstrated this potential through the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the SDGs, which were greatly significant in that they embody commitments by Member States to working across a range of issues to eliminate poverty and achieve sustained development over the next 15 years.

The determined implementation of the SDGs will enable us to address many of the root causes of migration. Lack of economic opportunity is a substantial driver of migration. To provide those opportunities, the SDGs set out an approach that involves investment in health care, education, water and sanitation and other essential services.

As States Members of the United Nations, we are now called to meet our obligation to implement the SDGs domestically within our own borders, bilaterally with our development partners, and multilaterally within regional and United Nations forums. Long-term action on underlying causes must be complemented by urgent steps to address the daily suffering arising from the refugee and migrant crisis. Ireland is committed to honouring pledges made at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul.

We must collectively ensure that in addressing crises closer to home we do not allow the more protracted crises, those that do not appear in the headlines on a daily basis, to be forgotten. The United Nations has a central role in humanitarian action. Ireland strongly supports the efforts to reform the United Nations system and coordination mechanisms to ensure a more effective response to the complex humanitarian needs around the world, including the protection of vulnerable groups in emergencies, most notably women and girls.

The most immediate trigger of mass migration is violent conflict, which forces great numbers of people to flee their homes and leave their communities. The horrific human toll of the grinding conflict in Syria mounts daily, and many countries in the region and far

beyond are grappling with the large-scale displacement of people that this conflict has created.

No two conflicts are comparable. However, I can say that on my own island, on the island of Ireland, for many years we experienced conflict, terrorism and loss of life. And with the support of a wide array of stakeholders, we eventually and painstakingly managed to build a sustainable peace process. Our lived experience of building peace and the ongoing process of reconciliation on the island of Ireland mean that we are particularly conscious of the persistent and determined commitment required to overcome conflict. We therefore give priority to investment in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconciliation.

We recognize the importance of the empowerment of women so that they can have a visible and recognized role in the decision-making process. Gender equality and women's empowerment are key cross-cutting priorities for my country, Ireland. We are committed to strengthening our engagement on these priorities during our membership in the Commission on the Status of Women, which commences on 1 January 2017. Ireland calls for the implementation of the conflict-prevention and peacebuilding aspects of the three high-level reviews of the United Nations peacekeeping and peacebuilding systems, which took place in 2015, and for a sustained commitment to the women and peace and security agenda.

We in Ireland know all too well that negotiating lasting political solutions for conflicts is often a lengthy task, with many stops and starts and setbacks along the way. Ireland welcomes and is actively participating in the initiative led by France to revive the stalled Middle East peace process, with the aim of leading ultimately to a negotiated two-State solution. The United Nations must play a central role in efforts to create the conditions for finding a political solution.

Six years into the horrific conflict in Syria, Ireland reaffirms its full support for the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to bring about an end to the devastating conflict through dialogue and diplomacy. We urge everybody in this Hall to play his or her part.

The continent of Africa is of course the source, but also the host, of the largest number of migrants and refugees, many of whom are fleeing war and poverty. Ireland calls for a transparent, accountable and human-rights-based resolution to the numerous conflicts in African countries, such as South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Those conflicts are severely hampering sustainable development on the continent and creating enormous humanitarian burdens for the affected countries, indeed for neighbouring countries as well, and the wider international community.

On a positive note, Ireland warmly welcomes the historic peace agreement reached in Colombia last month following five decades of conflict, four years of talks and, tragically, the killing of over 225,000 people. Each of these deaths represents a horrendous loss to their families and their loved ones and to their communities. We look forward to the signature of the final peace accord later this month, and we welcome the vital role played by the United Nations in monitoring the implementation of that process. Ireland is committed to actively supporting the Colombian peace process. We are pleased to offer whatever assistance we can to the process of rebuilding the country after decades of violence, including through the sharing of our experience in Northern Ireland. We wish the people of Colombia well at this time of hope.

As part of our commitment to conflict prevention and resolution, we have championed, over many long years, the matter of disarmament and non-proliferation, which must be placed at the fore of our collective efforts to prevent or minimize the impact of future conflict. We must all be mindful of the grave humanitarian consequences of any nuclear detonation, as well as the devastating impact of conventional, biological and chemical weapons. We have seen this year — in fact, we have seen this month — how a State Member of the United Nations can show in stark terms the reality of the risk of a nuclear detonation.

Ireland wishes to see genuine progress on multilateral nuclear disarmament, building on the work of the Open-ended Working Group. We are also concerned at evidence of harm to civilians from the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects and consequences in populated areas. The disproportionate gender impact of nuclear weapons and of illegal arms transfers and illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons is also a matter of great concern to us, as is the need to ensure greater gender balance in all disarmament discussions.

Effective and responsible United Nations peacekeeping is an important means of preventing

forced displacement at a time of conflict or uneasy peace. Ireland is strongly committed to its active role in United Nations peacekeeping operations. We are proud of our unbroken record of service extending over almost six decades.

This year we marked 100 years since our own Easter Rising, which set Ireland on the final phase of our path to independence, a highlight of our ongoing commitment to peace, development and freedom. Our commemoration included a parade of our defence forces marching through the streets of our capital city, Dublin. Many of those marching proudly wore the blue berets of the United Nations, as an emblem of their service with this great Organization. I take this opportunity to commend Irish soldiers and police participating in seven United Nations peacekeeping missions around the world for their courage, their bravery and their sacrifice.

An Irish Major General assumed the role of Head of Mission and Force Commander of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in July, and in November, we will assume the leadership of its Irish/Finnish battalion. We also remain actively committed to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. I recently visited troops in the Golan and was very struck by the greater challenge of their operating environment today, compared with that of when the mission was established some years ago. I therefore urge colleagues in the United Nations to ensure that our troops are adequately supported as they go about this important, challenging and often dangerous work.

In Ireland, service with the United Nations is rightly regarded as both noble and important. The effectiveness of the United Nations depends on its positive reputation as a force for good in the world. Therefore, it is critical that the performance, behaviour and reputation of troops or civilians engaged in United Nations operations be held to the highest possible standard. Sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers sent to conflict zones to protect innocent civilians from harm is totally unacceptable. Ireland calls for an end to impunity for these crimes. We absolutely commit to holding our own troops fully accountable for their behaviour when they are deployed overseas.

Human rights abuses are among the root causes of migration. Moreover, migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, in particular women, children and vulnerable people, can also be at risk of human rights abuse both during their journey and on arrival at their destination.

Ireland is committed to defending those who defend the human rights of others, including journalists and other civil-society representatives who face increasing restrictions and threats in many parts of the world. Our leadership in the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 32/31, on civil society space, last June enabled the international community to send a strong message of solidarity to those at risk. Ireland will always speak out to defend minorities who continue to suffer persecution because of religion, belief, ethnicity or gender, or a host of other reasons. We will continue to work on the European Union resolution on freedom of religion or belief during this session of the General Assembly.

On the matter of United Nations reform, I am pleased that the agreement reached on the SDGs has showed what the United Nations can achieve when working at its best. We call for all members of the Security Council — in particular China, the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and France — to refrain from voting against credible draft resolutions on action to halt the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, including conflict-related sexual violence.

Ireland believes that the Security Council membership should be more balanced and ensure wider regional representation, particularly with regard to Africa. The more open, transparent and inclusive process taking place this year to select the new Secretary-General is a positive step in the right direction.

Mr. Bhattarai (Nepal), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We must collectively do all that we can to ensure that the 65 million people currently displaced, whether by conflict, natural disaster or oppression, are provided with the essential services to which they are entitled. We need to uphold on all occasions the values, purposes and principles of the United Nations. These are the values, purposes and principles that Ireland has stood up for throughout our engagement with the United Nations regime, and which will inspire our contribution to the Security Council, should the membership entrust us with that responsibility in the 2020 election.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Lilja Dögg Alfreðsdóttir, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iceland.

Ms. Alfreðsdóttir (Iceland): At the end of the nineteenth century, one quarter of the Icelandic population emigrated to Canada and the United States. Iceland was one of the poorest countries in Europe, and people were seeking a better life for themselves and their families. The image of the struggling Icelander — crossing the ocean, seasick and hungry — is still embedded in the minds of our people. But we do know that many of our fellow countrymen achieved success in their new home. I truly believe that they have had a positive impact on their communities. The Icelandic migrants were not refugees. They were not fleeing war and disaster. But they were seeking safety and better lives for their families.

Today, millions of people are displaced by conflict and disaster. The long-term goal of the international community must be to create peace where there is conflict and economic opportunities where there are none, so that countries of origin do not lose their human capital and people can stay safely in their homes. Today, we are faced with humanitarian crisis and we must all step up to the plate. Iceland — a country of only 330,000 people — has contributed to addressing the issue, both with funding to the relevant institutions and by welcoming a group of Syrian refugees. In the weeks to come, we are welcoming another group from Syria, bringing the overall number in 2016 to more than 100. For a small country, these numbers are big — the equivalent of 100,000 in the United States.

The Middle East and North Africa regions remain in conflict and crisis, often driven by injustice and human rights failures. The Syrian conflict continues to inflict suffering on millions. I strongly condemn the attack on the United Nations humanitarian convoy earlier this week and the new attacks on Aleppo. I also urge the conflicting parties, and especially the Syrian Government, to commit to finding a political solution. The suspected war crimes committed in this conflict threaten to undermine international law for the time to come. These war crimes must be prosecuted. Along with others, I praise the generosity of the neighbouring States — Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey — in addressing the issue.

It should be possible to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but actions by both sides have continued to undermine the negotiation of a two-State solution. There is violence and provocation on both sides. Settlement expansion and the destruction of Palestinian structures undermine the basis for peace. The Security Council should take action to back the recommendations of the Quartet via a resolution. At the same time, we urge the parties to foster a climate of tolerance.

The sense of injustice and failure of governance is often at the root of other conflicts. The question of Western Sahara remains unresolved. We urge both sides to exercise restraint and to do their utmost to reduce tensions in line with United Nations resolutions.

Africa and the Middle East are the regions worst hit by terrorism and violent extremism. But no country is left untouched, and terrorism has returned to Europe. That is a vivid reminder for my region that other societies may harbour individuals with beliefs that can be turned into justifications for violence and terrorism. It is a global threat of massive scope and complexity. We must act together as a world community. We must improve United Nations coordination in dealing with terrorism and violent extremism. We must challenge narratives and ideologies together and identify internal and external drivers of violent extremism and terrorism.

Nelson Mandela said, Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Education is a precondition of good governance. If people do not know their rights or how to seek justice and do not understand the views of others, then building peaceful and inclusive societies is very difficult. Education remains a key pillar in Iceland's development cooperation. Over the past 70 years Icelandic society has developed from being a poor society to a modern, prosperous economy. We could not have done that if we had not ensured access for all to quality education at both secondary and higher levels.

Education shines a light on our path to ensuring human rights for all. In one century, women have seen great progress, even though the progress is uneven. I stand here today, one of only 30 or so female Foreign Ministers in the world, as proof that we have come a long way, yet not nearly far enough. Women's human rights lag severely behind in many countries, at great cost to women, men and society as a whole.

We have agreed that no one can be left behind. That includes every individual, no matter the colour of her or his skin, her or his disability or religion or whom she or

he loves. If we want resilient and healthy societies, we must make it our business to safeguard the rights and interests of minority groups, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups.

The United Nations is the heart and soul of all international efforts. It is our responsibility to safeguard the Organization and ensure that it is ready for the challenges ahead. The new approach for appointing the Secretary-General raises the profile and standing of the United Nations. It is a major milestone to see such a strong field of women candidates. I would like to pay tribute to the former President of the General Assembly, Mr. Lykketoft, for his efforts to make the new approach work. It is now for the Security Council to propose to the General Assembly a candidate who has wide support, credibility and respect. I hope we will succeed in finding her or him.

We have set our sights high for the future of our planet. We have set goals to address climate change. We have mapped out a course to sustainable development that is universal, leaves no one behind and preserves our planet. The rules and objectives have been agreed — a major achievement. Now we have to implement them. With political will, knowledge-sharing and innovation, I am confident that we will succeed.

A large number of States have already ratified the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, thus paving the way for its early entry into force. In particular, I welcome the leadership shown by the United States of America and China. And I am proud to inform the Assembly that I handed over Iceland's instrument of ratification earlier this week.

The world's common road map to sustainable development — the 2030 Agenda — should be taped to the wall of every planning ministry. The Icelandic Government is keenly aware that the Agenda needs to concern every one of us. The Agenda presents challenges and opportunities to government, business and civil society in every country.

In Iceland we want to be sure of reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on time. W are therefore setting up the structures and identifying the gaps to help us do that. Iceland aims to present its own national review in two years. Sharing ideas and knowledge will be a key element of our common success. For many years, Iceland has hosted United Nations University training programmes in four areas of importance to our agenda, namely, gender equality, sustainable geothermal energy, sustainable management of the oceans and combating desertification. We will continue to make a contribution in those areas of Icelandic expertise.

Twenty-two years ago I lived in South Korea. To my surprise, I saw many similarities between Iceland and South Korea. Both countries rose from poverty to prosperity in only a few decades, and both gained independence in the 1940. And both are democracies and base their economic welfare on market economics.

In contrast, the people of North Korea still live in poverty, with a gross domestic product per capita equal to only 5 per cent of that of their cousins to the south. They experience higher infant mortality and lower life expectancy than their cousins, and even starvation. Severe human rights violations are committed by a dictatorship Government. It is shocking to see how the Government of North Korea continues its illegal pursuit of nuclear weapons, thereby risking not only the security of its own people and the entire region but also international security. Iceland strongly condemns North Korea's nuclear testing, which is in breach of universally accepted norms and international law.

As politicians we bear a heavy responsibility to govern to the best of our ability and in the interests of all people. Good governance is outlined in a key global goal. In many ways, it is the keystone of the 2030 Agenda.

While each nation is sovereign, none of us is isolated from the world or world events. Yet we have seen powerful countries breach fundamental principles of international law by invading other States. International law is key to cross-country relations and the integrity of our global system. For a small and peaceful country like mine, international law is our sword, shield and shelter.

In 2006 nobody had heard of iPhones or tablets or apps, there were no apple slices at McDonald's, and Segways were seen only in science fiction movies. But 2006 brought two things that everyone in this building seems to love, namely, Twitter and Mr. Ban Ki-moon, who is stepping down after 10 successful years as Secretary-General of the United Nations. During those years we have seen tremendous change. His personal commitment to fighting climate change has been a key factor in our reaching agreement. He has laid the groundwork for reforming United Nations peacekeeping operations. And he has shown strong

leadership on gender issues. On behalf of Iceland, I would like to thank Mr. Ban Ki-moon for his extraordinary contribution as Secretary-General.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Sirodjidin Aslov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Mr. Aslov (Tajikistan): It gives me a great pleasure to join the cordial congratulations on the well-deserved election of the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. We are confident that his wisdom, diplomatic experience and skill will contribute to the success of the current session, and my delegation would like to assure him of its full cooperation to that end. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for his able leadership during the previous session.

I also avail myself of this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, for his tireless efforts during his two terms in promoting global peace and security, development and well-being for all peoples of the world. His competent and effective leadership has been a positive force in reforming the Secretariat, easing crises and disputes, addressing current and emerging challenges and elaborating a new agenda on sustainable development and climate change. For all of those efforts, I would like to convey the sincere gratitude of the people of the Republic of Tajikistan.

The year 2015 was momentous because of the adoption of a number of key documents aimed at strengthening the global development agenda. Those documents are interrelated and will define the path of our development in the coming decades. However, we have been less successful in addressing issues affecting international peace and security. Armed conflicts continue to pose a growing threat in various regions of the world. Destructive and inhumane forces of terrorism and extremism have been gaining power by attracting into their orbits ever-increasing numbers of youth, thereby seriously undermining efforts to maintain security and peaceful development.

Combating international terrorism and extremism has become a top priority. There is a need to develop national, regional and international mechanisms aimed at eliminating military infrastructure, channels for financial and logistical support, recruitment and violent propaganda, including counteracting the use of modern Internet and computer technology for terrorism purposes. Moreover, it is essential that we jointly seek ways of addressing the issue of poverty, the negative impact of globalization, and conflict prevention and settlement. There is also a need to strengthen intercultural and interfaith dialogue, mutual trust and tolerance. In that context, the United Nations remains the key platform for achieving consensus on the main issues of international security and development and for coordinating joint action by the international community in addressing the challenges and threats of today.

Eliminating illicit drug trafficking, which has become a breeding ground for terrorism and organized crime, requires the joint and concerted actions of the entire international community. We believe that the fight against drug trafficking is an essential part of the fight against organized crime, terrorism and extremism, and we reaffirm that international cooperation on drug control will remain a priority of the Government of Tajikistan. The special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in April 2016, provided a unique opportunity for seeking new and additional ways of strengthening cooperation in combating the root causes of the drug problem and dealing with its consequences. During its membership on the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Tajikistan will continue its cooperation with donor countries and international organizations, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in order to implement the outcome document of the special session resolution S-30/1, annex).

Tajikistan stands for a comprehensive settlement of the crises in the Middle East, which will contribute to enhancing global security. We therefore support international and regional efforts aimed at restoring and strengthening peace and stability in the Middle East, including the efforts to resume and accelerate credible negotiations under the Middle East peace process.

Tajikistan supports the international strategy for a comprehensive settlement and post-conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan. We need to strengthen our support to the Government of Afghanistan, especially during Afghanistan's transformation decade 2015-2024. It is important for Afghanistan to become involved in the process of regional integration by strengthening its economic and trade ties with its neighbouring countries. We call for the expansion of targeted assistance to Afghanistan aimed at economic

rehabilitation, the strengthening of its social conditions and the creation of new jobs in its economy. We are ready to take part in rehabilitating the social and economic infrastructure of Afghanistan by connecting the transport arteries of our two countrie by creating an energy bridge known as CASA-1000, and providing the Afghan population with essential commodities and training for specialists.

We are at the beginning of a transformation process that started with the setting of a new agenda that reflects the hopes and desires of every one of us for a decent and secure future. It is obvious that the path to sustainable development will be neither easy nor smooth. At the same time, our political will should be reinforced by adequate means of implementation. There is a need to mobilize additional financial resources, including official development assistance, which is the main component in financing development. Under the current circumstances, it is essential to revitalize international trade and investments, which are the main engines of productive growth, and encourage and promote transfers of innovative and ecologically sound technologies.

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda also requires clear and transparent mechanisms to follow up and review both progress and problems. As a new and first-time member of the Economic and Social Council, Tajikistan is willing to do its part in strengthening and coordinating the efforts to address the complex issues of achieving sustainable development. In our endeavours to achieve sustainable development, we need to remember our collective determination to lend a hand to countries that are confronted with difficulties. We need to remember that a number of countries will begin their implementation of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in unfavourable conditions. In particular, there is a need to provide support to countries in special situations, especially the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.

Access to modern and cost-efficient energy services is key to achieving sustainable development. Tajikistan actively supports the Secretary-General's Sustainable Energy for All initiative and the United Nations 2014-2024 Decade of Sustainable Energy for All.

I would like to emphasize that the 2030 Agenda regards water as the most essential element of life and the main component of development. That is a positive shift, which makes the new water agenda more comprehensive and integrated by comparison with the previous water agenda, framed within the Millennium Development Goals. In that regard, we should take into consideration the fact that climate change, as well as the processes of urbanization and population growth, will certainly exacerbate any challenges. In addition, as a result of climate change, water shortages in many parts of the world will increase owing, first of all, to a reduction in the scale of glaciers and the snowpack. For instance, in Tajikistan during the past 35 to 40 years more than 1,000 massive glaciers out of a total of 13,000 have melted completely. That melting of glaciers and ice caps has caused increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters and the deterioration of ecosystems, which have translated to significant financial and material losses for the national economy and, unfortunately, have caused human casualties.

Nevertheless, the new water agenda is achievable. We have observed that significant progress can be made when countries and regions commit to prioritizing water challenges. What is clear is that countries and the international community as a whole must work together and undertake coordinated efforts and adopt both urgent and long-term measures. That is particularly true when water is shared among various sectors — health, agriculture, energy and navigation, for example — or when surface and groundwater are shared among communities and between countries.

Those were among the issues related to the implementation of the global water agenda discussed at the High-level Symposium on SDG 6 and Targets: Ensuring that No One Is Left Behind in Access to Water and Sanitation, held in Dushanbe on 9 and 10 August and jointly organized by the Government of Tajikistan, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and various United Nations agencies. The Symposium provided a platform for a balanced discussion of policy measures, actions and the means to fast-track the implementation of the water-related SDGs and targets. It adopted a call for action that invites the international community to deepen its cooperation at all levels to address emerging water issues, to improve capacity in the implementation and monitoring of integrated water resources management and to support an International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018-2028.

I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all Member States for their active participation in the

Symposium. I hope that the members of the Assembly will also support the proposed International Decade, which will strengthen and enhance the progress achieved during the previous International Decade for Action, "Water for Life", 2005-2015, and will create a solid platform for the consolidation of our efforts aimed at the sustainable management of water resources in the post-2015 period. The proposed International Decade will complement other initiated mechanisms, notably the High-level Panel on 2030 Global Water Architecture, and it can serve to fill any gaps that may arise in the implementation of new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Prakash Sharan Mahat, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

Mr. Mahat (Nepal): I wish to begin by congratulating the President on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at the seventy-first session. I wish to assure him of my delegation's full support in the successful discharge of his important responsibilities. I also want to commend the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for his effective leadership at the seventieth session.

I wish to place on record Nepal's admiration of His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the dedication with which he served this world Organization for the past 10 years. We wish him well for the future.

Exactly six decades ago, at the eleventh session of the General Assembly, Nepal first spoke as a newly admitted Member. Now, 60 years down the road, our commitment to the United Nations has become even stronger. The principles of the Charter of the United Nations remain at the core of Nepal's foreign policy. As much as the United Nations has contributed to our development endeavours, and lately to the peace process, Nepal has significantly contributed to the United Nations in fulfilling its primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security.

It has been a year since we adopted the universal and transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the objective of leaving no one behind. After one year, it is clear now that much more needs to be done to move from commitments to results. Let me stress the fact that the secure foundation of world peace rests on the well-being of the peoples across the globe. Poverty reduction and sustainable development are therefore inseparable. We cannot imagine a peaceful, prosperous and secure society when millions of people live in poverty. I therefore urge all Member States and our development partners to move beyond rhetoric and commence concrete actions without losing time, energy or zeal.

It is also evident that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be realized unless sound development policies and frameworks are supported by a capable institutional framework, adequate resources and innovative methods of implementation. As much as national commitment, ownership, leadership and people-centric governance are critical in the domestic context, robust international partnerships are equally important to ensure the success of the SDGs. We would like to see progress in terms of the principal components of the resource base — official development assistance, trade, foreign direct investment, technology and debt relief — to ensure the smooth implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Nepal's commitment to the SDGs is informed by its success in reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Amid multiple challenges, Nepal's performance in that respect was impressive. We were able to halve the proportion of people living in poverty and to significantly reduce the maternal and infant mortality rates. We were able to send more children to school and keep them in school. The enrolment of girls in schools was substantially increased. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is now part of our national development plans and programmes and will be implemented with the utmost priority.

The vision for a safer world continues to elude us. New sources of threats to humankind have emerged, while the traditional sources of threats have simultaneously become more pronounced. The forms and intensity of non-traditional threats to security — terrorism, transnational crimes, ethnic tensions, intra-State conflicts and violent extremism — have multiplied. The abuse by criminal actors of innovations in information and communications technology has added to social vulnerability. We underline the central role of the General Assembly and the Security Council in addressing such threats and challenges.

The increasing terrorist activity in our own region and in many parts of the world is a matter of serious concern for all of us. Terrorism is a serious threat to the human goal of living in harmony, peace and

dignity. Nepal condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The failure of the international community to agree on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism is highly frustrating. We call upon the international community to muster the much-needed political will to accomplish this agenda.

To create a secure world we must adopt a two-track approach. We must deal with emerging threats resolutely, firmly and collectively. On a much broader scale, we also need to nurture a culture of peace. As the birthplace of Lord Buddha, Nepal believes that meaningful exchanges and dialogues among civilizations will help instil positive values, which will contribute to eventual world peace.

We would like to see an early resolution of the conflict in Syria. The suffering of the Syrian people must now come to an end. Nepal supports the call for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We recognize the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to an independent State, based on United Nations resolutions, and the right of every nation in the region to live in peace, within secure and recognized international boundaries.

Nepal stands for the complete and time-bound disarmament of all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear ones. An environment must be created in which development dividends can be released by disarmament and redirected towards productive use. The global community, especially the nuclear States, must make a determined effort to move forward from the stalled negotiations on disarmament. We believe that all efforts to bring about disarmament must be pursued in good faith and in full compliance with the agreed international regimes. Based on our principled position, Nepal hosts the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific. We invite Member States and partners to support and fully utilize the Centre to promote dialogue on disarmament, thereby enhancing the Kathmandu process.

United Nations peacekeeping operations are an important innovation of the United Nations and are dedicated to the service of humankind. Nepal's engagement in peacekeeping operations, started just three years after joining the United Nations, speaks volumes about our unflinching commitment to the cause of international peace and security. We feel proud to be part of that flagship contribution. Our troops have served in various challenging peacekeeping missions with a high degree of professionalism, commitment and devotion. That has helped them earn international acclaim. Seventy-three of our fellow countrymen have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty to the supreme cause of peace. We remain steadfast in our commitment to fulfil our obligations and are prepared to provide additional troops and civilians to United Nations peacekeeping operations. That is because we have a strong conviction that the success of the United Nations largely hinges on the success of its peacekeeping operations.

However, we also believe that for the peacekeeping missions to be successful, there must be unity of purpose in mobilizing all of the political capital of the Security Council. We must establish clearly defined mandates and operational modalities, provide adequate resource back-up, ensure the safety and security of personnel, arrange regular consultations and greater collaboration with the troop-contributing countries and devise clear exit strategies.We also believe that peacekeeping alone cannot guarantee durable peace in societies. It should be complemented by proper and clearly defined peacebuilding strategies led and owned by the people and societies themselves. We would also like to underline that all troop-contributing countries must be afforded fair opportunities to serve in leadership positions, both in the field and at Headquarters, commensurate with the level and length of their contributions.

We are satisfied that human rights values have now become truly global. Human rights must not be used as a tool to serve hidden political interests. All human rights, including the right to development, must receive equal priority and be pursued even-handedly. The salient features of non-selectivity, universality, indivisibility and objectivity must be upheld in all circumstances. The sanctity of the Human Rights Council and the innovative universal periodic review mechanism must be maintained to ensure the full ownership of human rights.

Nepal's commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms is total and unwavering. We are party to most of the core international human rights instruments, which have found eloquent expression in Nepal's newly promulgated Constitution. The new Constitution of Nepal, which was the result of eight years of deliberation that ensured participatory, transparent and inclusive processes, includes an impressive list of human rights and provides adequate

remedial measures. Nepal has abolished the death penalty and is a party to the first Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It has put in place the necessary legal, institutional and administrative measures for the realization of all human rights.

The National Human Rights Commission and other independent constitutional bodies were established with the sole objective of protecting and promoting human rights in all spheres of national life. Nepal's homegrown peace process recognizes transitional justice as its key component. The Commission on Investigation of Disappeared Persons and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are carrying out their mandates in an independent and impartial manner. The Government is committed to taking appropriate measures to address the issues surrounding the process of transitional justice in line with our international commitment and the ground realities of establishing sustained peace.

Nepal has been working closely with the Human Rights Council with all sincerity and commitment. Informed by our experience of protecting and promoting of human rights and our sincere desire to contribute to the work of the Human Rights Council, we are seeking membership on the Council for the term beginning 2018. It is the first time we have filed our candidature. We request the support of all fellow Member States for our candidature.

Migration has become a defining phenomenon of the contemporary world. The global movement of people has brought benefits and challenges. The proper management of migration can contribute to the economic growth and development of both the destination and the origin countries of migrant workers. The welfare and the protection of the rights of migrant workers must therefore receive priority in the countries in which they work. As the source country of over 3 million migrant workers, Nepal calls for concerted efforts at the national, regional and international levels to ensure that the process creates a fair and win-win situation for all.

Despite not being a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, Nepal has long hosted refugees on humanitarian grounds. International burden-sharing has greatly helped to lessen the burden host countries face. However, the right of refugees to return to their homeland in safety and dignity must always be upheld in all circumstances.

While globalization has created many opportunities, the benefits which countries have reaped from it have been uneven. The constraints on countries in special circumstances, particularly the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, are real. That is why international financial, trading and monetary systems must be responsive to their needs and concerns. Robust implementation of internationally agreed commitments, including those contained in the Istanbul Programme of Action, the Vienna Programme of Action, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, are critically important to enable those countries to emerge from the states of poverty and underdevelopment they are experiencing. Delay in the conclusion of the Doha Round of trade negotiations is a huge setback; it is denying countries many development dividends of trade and hampering the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As to climate change, Nepal, as a Himalayan country, faces challenges in the form of melting glaciers and flash floods from glacial-lake outbursts. We believe that the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, adopted last year, reflects a rare commitment by the international community to making a difference. We support its early entry into force. Nepal also believes that climate justice based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities should be at the centre of its implementation. Special attention must be given to the climate-vulnerable countries, particularly mountainous countries, as regards providing resources and transferring technology for capacity-building and adaptation. Our efforts must recognize the intrinsic connection between poverty reduction, sustainable development and environmental protection.

We must acknowledge that the United Nations system has a leading role to play in global governance. Equal emphasis must be laid on all three pillars of the United Nations: development, peace and security, and human rights. The reform of the United Nations must reflect the vastly transformed political reality of the twenty-first century. Our vision for sustainable peace and a just world order cannot be realized without a comprehensive reform of the United Nations, including reform of the Security Council. Nepal strongly believes in a more representative, inclusive and accountable United Nations.

In recent years Nepal has undergone a political transformation of historic proportions. The decade-long armed conflict was finally converted into a peace process with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006. Commitment to democratic norms and values was the central thrust of the peace process, which led to the holding of the first-ever elections for the Constituent Assembly. Arms management and the integration of combatants was successfully carried out as part of the peace process. With the promulgation of the democratic Constitution on 20 September last year, the peace process basically came to a close.

Nepal's homegrown peace process and its success may provide a good model for countries transitioning from conflict to peace. The promulgation of our Constitution represents a turning point in Nepal's constitutional and political history. Among other things, the Constitution aims to institutionalize inclusive and democratic polity, pluralism, the rule of law, representative and accountable government, social and economic justice and universally accepted human rights.

Equality is at the core of the Constitution. Equal opportunity and protection are guaranteed to every citizen. Discrimination on any ground is prohibited. The State is obliged to take special measures to protect the most marginalized and underrepresented sections of society and ensure their well-being. Our Constitution is not a rigid document, but rather a living and dynamic one that is capable of addressing any remaining or new issues within its framework. The two amendments that were made within months of its promulgation amply prove this.

We are currently engaged in dialogue with concerned political parties to find an acceptable solution to some of the issues where differences persist. The Constitution guarantees equal participation and incorporates the principle of proportional representation of women, indigenous nationalities, Madhesis, Dalits and other marginalized groups in elective bodies and other organs of the State structure. Nepal has a strong commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Women are guaranteed a minimum of one third representation in the federal and provincial parliaments, and 40 per cent in local government. I am proud to inform the General Assembly that in Nepal the Head of State, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Speaker of the Parliament are all women.

We have entered a crucial phase in implementing our Constitution in Nepal. Our ultimate goal is to consolidate peace and stability and bring about prosperity in the country. Inclusive economic growth and development are important to sustain political gains. The Constitution provides a framework to pursue those objectives. Democratic elections for all three tiers of the federal system must be completed by February 2018. That is a huge task, but we are determined to carry it out successfully, thereby helping to institutionalize the federal democratic system of governance, as promised by the Constitution. Further tasks include addressing the outstanding issues of the peace process, reconstructing and rebuilding earthquake-ravaged areas and achieving inclusive prosperity and development; they constitute our top priorities.

As we embark upon the effective implementation of the Constitution and undertake the vital process of the socioeconomic transformation of Nepal, the goodwill, solidarity and support of the international community become all the more important. We are confident that our friends in the international community will stand by us in our efforts to build a strong foundation for a peaceful, stable, democratic and prosperous Nepal.

The United Nations today is confronted with unprecedented challenges. However, unique opportunities also exist — and can be seized to transform the world into a peaceful place in which to live. We have the capacity, resources and technology to address the challenges and ensure prosperity and dignity for everyone. But we must muster the necessary political will to achieve that. Let us make a solemn commitment here in the Hall of the General Assembly that the world of tomorrow will be different from that of today. We want the history of the twenty-first century to unfold not as a history of conflict, strife, poverty, hunger and indignation, but as a history of prosperity, peace, development and partnership.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Jean-Claude Gakosso, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Congolese Nationals Abroad of the Congo.

Mr. Gakosso (Congo) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, at the outset, to convey my sincerest congratulations to Mr. Peter Thomson on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. The Republic of the Congo, as one of the Vice-Presidents

who will help to lighten his burden during the session, is fully committed to his success.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay heartfelt tribute to Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, who is coming to the end of his term of office as Secretary-General. Thanks to his leadership, he has been able to mobilize world leaders and all actors on the international stage around the great global challenges of our time. He has laid the foundation for the reform of the Organization and created conditions conducive to its fully undertaking its historic mission in global governance.

The Republic of the Congo welcomes the work accomplished by the outgoing President, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, whose wisdom and foresight facilitated the unanimous adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda heralds the historic advent of a new era of sustainable development.

I would like to remind the Assembly that the Government of my country expended considerable resources on the implementation of the Millenium Development Goals. We now seek to build our future on these beginnings and continue our commitment by achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the ultimate aim being to guarantee the welfare of the Congolese people.

However, the efforts of our Government today require the support of the international community, specifically through financial mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund, the Blue Fund, the Adaptation Fund and the Green Economy Fund in Central Africa. I can assure the Assembly that the Government of my country will invest all available resources and spare no effort to ensure that all Congolese people live in dignity and that no one is left behind. Such was the commitment undertaken by my country in adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Republic of the Congo appreciates the value and significance of the decision at the Group of 20 (G-20) Summit held recently in Hangzhou, China, to support the industrialization of developing countries, in particular in Africa, where this is greatly needed. This timely decision reassures us of the commitment of the G-20 countries with a view to implementing Sustainable Development Goal 17 in its target of revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development. We fail to see how Africa can develop sustainably and modernize without first undergoing industrialization. We know that industrialization is contingent upon an energy supply, and it is for that reason that the Republic of the Congo fully supports the electrification plans for the continent that are currently being discussed. We trust that this is not a pious hope.

Five years ago, we all welcomed the birth of the youngest nation of this world, that is, the Republic of South Sudan. Unfortunately, two years after its independence this country was plunged into seemingly endless fratricidal conflicts, for which its civilians have paid a heavy price. From this rostrum, we encourage all stakeholders in that conflict to demonstrate their political will and perseverance by committing in good faith to the implementation of the peace agreement signed in August 2015 in Addis Ababa. The severity of the situation in South Sudan today requires the rapid deployment of a regional protection force under a Security Council mandate. Such deployment is imperative in all respects, for the time has come to end this intolerable bloodbath that risks compromising the future of this young nation forever. Equally imperative is the need to build a climate of trust among the various protagonists to the conflict in order to ensure that national reconciliation can indeed be achieved.

Just yesterday the Central African Republic fell prey to a grave crisis. Today, thanks to international solidarity and the commitment of the United Nations, the European Union, France, the United States and members of the Economic Community of Central African States, that country was able to successfully manage a political transition, which concluded with presidential elections, thereby paving the way for a better future with collective hope. The Republic of the Congo welcomes that accomplishment, which is an expression of the will of a people determined to rid themselves of their old demons and to restore peace and stability after several years of chaos. The Republic of the Congo encourages the efforts for peace, reconciliation and reconstruction that President Faustin Archange Touadera and his Government are undertaking with courage and self-sacrifice. My country reiterates here — just as it did at the ninth meeting of the International Contact Group on the Central African Republic, held recently in Bangui - our support for, and solidarity with, our brother country within the framework of both the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and the International Support Group.

We cannot but deplore the tragic events that have for nearly a week now shaken Kinshasa and plunged the

brother people of the Democratic Republic of Congo into mourning. As the Secretary-General did a few days ago, we invite our Congolese brothers to seek peaceful solutions through an inclusive dialogue in a spirit of mutual tolerance.

The post-electoral crisis in Gabon has engendered acts of violence that continue to be a source of concern for us all. We very much hope that the brother people of that country will draw on that Bantu wisdom we share with them in order to emerge reconciled from that difficult ordeal.

I could not conclude my statement without mentioning the recent institutional developments that my own country has undergone following the referendum held on 25 October 2015. The referendum led to the adoption of a new Constitution, better adapted to the requirements of a law-abiding State in its most widely accepted form. We now have a Constitution that strengthens the principle of the separation of powers, enshrines the independence of the judiciary, abolishes the death penalty, affirms the equality of men and women, recognizes the fundamental rights of our indigenous peoples and lays the groundwork for a participatory democracy. We have a Constitution that, alongside our national human rights commission, establishes bodies whose duty it is to maintain social cohe ion through justice and equity, but also by bringing peace and tranquillity to hearts and minds. They include a national dialogue council, a women's advisory council, a youth advisory council, a national council of elders and an advisory council for people with disabilities.

In short, all of these many innovations, which seek to respond to the desires of our sovereign people and the many challenges facing us today, will undoubtedly improve political, economic and social governance in our country. All of them are intended to benefit the greater good of our people.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Erlan Abdyldayev, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Mr. Abdyldayev (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to congratulate Mr. Peter Thomson on his election to preside over the General Assembly at its seventy-first session, and to thank Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the Assembly during the seventieth session, for his fruitful leadership of the Assembly's work.

Kyrgyzstan supports the theme of our debate, "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world", which seems very timely to us in the wake of the Assembly's adoption last year of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the conclusion of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

On 31 August, Kyrgyzstan marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of its independence. Over the years we have been progressing along the difficult path of building a democratic, lawful and economically developed State. Only six years have passed since the people's revolution of April 2010, which paved the way for Kyrgyzstan's rebirth. We are proud of what our country has achieved since then. We have taken our own particular and very difficult road to freedom and democracy, and we have paid a high price for it. The freedom-loving people of Kyrgyzstan have learned hard lessons from the mistakes of their first 20 years of independence. Today, they have emerged from that onto the road to stability and shown the world the experience that they have gained in overcoming acute social and political crises and building a free society.

Kyrgyzstan has suffered, but has made a conscious choice to build a parliamentary democracy. In October 2015, for the first time in the country's history, we held national parliamentary elections using biometric technology. The election results were accepted by all political parties, a testimony to the unity of our people, and have been unanimously recognized as democratic by the international community. I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General and all friendly countries for their support for our election preparations. In 2017 we will hold presidential elections, and we urge the United Nations and our partner countries to continue supporting Kyrgyzstan's efforts to conduct the elections to choose our next leader in accordance with international standards.

Kyrgyzstan fully supports the adoption of a comprehensive agenda for international development in the form of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We welcome the fact that the Sustainable Development Goals take into account the lessons of the efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the needs of mountainous and landlocked developing countries such as ours. For Kyrgyzstan, the biggest priority areas in the Sustainable Development Goals include poverty reduction, food security, quality

education and health care, economic growth, energy and the preservation of the environment.

As we know, one of the three pillars of the 2030 Agenda consists of environmental issues. In Paris, we all worked together to reach a consensus on climate change. Kyrgyzstan fully supports that global agreement, and yesterday we signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change on the margins of the general debate. In Kyrgyzstan, the effects of global warming are already leading to natural disasters and extreme situations, with fluctuations in the volumes of mountain rivers, excessive melting of glaciers and the degradation of unique mountain ecosystems. All of this has led to negative social consequences and significant harm to economic sectors. We estimate that the annual damage from natural disasters in Kyrgyzstan amounts to about $35 million, rendering us in need of international assistance in adapting to climate change.

We are particularly concerned about the increased melting of our glaciers, which represent Central Asia's natural storage of water resources. The prediction is that by 2025 Kyrgyzstan's total glacier area could shrink by an average of 30 to 40 per cent, resulting in a drop of between 25 and 35 per cent in the volumes of our rivers. Kyrgyzstan therefore supports the undertaking of joint projects aimed at conserving glaciers in countries in our region with mountain rivers.

On top of that, climate change is threatening the biodiversity of our mountain ecosystems. In particular, since the 1990s, our snow leopard population has fallen by half, from 600 to 300 animals. In 2013 we held the first Global Snow Leopard Conservation Forum, which has become the starting point for cooperation among countries that have snow leopard habitats, as well as with our international partners. Next year, Kyrgyzstan will convene a second Global Forum, where we will consider the results of the work that has been done and decide on future joint action for conserving those rare animals.

Another serious problem that cannot be solved without the international community's participation is the presence of the numerous uranium tailings scattered throughout the countries of our region. The scale of the problem requires focused and coordinated work within the framework of resolution 68/218, entitled "The role of the international community in averting the radiation threat in Central Asia". In that connection, we have proposed holding a high-level international forum on the resolution in May or June 2017. The Kyrgyz Republic is ready to do the necessary preparatory work for the forum along with other concerned countries and international organizations, and we hope to have the support of the international community for those efforts.

For every State, sustainable development depends on security and stability, including at the global level. Unfortunately, the current session of the General Assembly is taking place against a backdrop of international tension in Afghanistan, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and Ukraine. The differences between the world's major Powers on current international political issues remain, and the pressures of sanctions persist. Such international circumstances and the confrontational attitude of some countries are not conducive to dealing with today's challenges and threats through a collective approach conducted under United Nations auspices. Rather, their global nature demands that every country, without exception, continue to cooperate and collaborate in the interests of all humankind. We believe that the world Powers must put aside their differences and pool their efforts to combat the threats to international security.

In an era of globalization, the processes involve other countries as well as the parties to a conflict. Kyrgyzstan is no exception. We have unfortunately not been spared by phenomena such as terrorism, extremism, religious intolerance and radicalization, although they began and evolved far beyond the borders of Kyrgyzstan. We have been obliged to act to protect the interests of the State and our citizens. However, we believe it is more effective to deal with them locally from the start, in their own breeding grounds. It is crucial that we provide international assistance to the countries that are battling the problem at the national level, including within the framework of the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism proposed by the Secretary-General in January.

In combating terrorism and extremism, it is important to ensure that force is accompanied by preventive measures and intercultural dialogue. Kyrgyzstan, like every other people, ethnic group and country, has its own unique history and culture. In order to popularize the peaceful values, traditions and customs of nomadic civilization, in 2011 Kyrgyzstan launched an initiative to stage the World Nomad Games, and thus in 2014, on the shores of the mountain lake Issyk-Kul, the first-ever World Nomad Games were

held. Two weeks ago, also by Issyk-Kul, we held the second World Nomad Games, in which representatives and athletes from 62 countries took part. Thousands came to watch the uniquely spectacular and original athletic contests.

The World Nomad Games are helping to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation among countries and peoples from many different cultures and religions. With regard to , the Assembly's resolution on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, Kyrgyzstan supports the inclusion of a provision supporting the periodic holding of the World Nomad Games, and we are counting on support for that initiative from the States Members of the United Nations.

Kyrgyzstan believes that if the countries of Central Asia are to have sustainable development and security, they must strengthen their mutual trust and cooperation. We have been compelled to confront the fact that many of the region's problems are a long way from being solved successfully and functionally. Our active efforts to provide regional security, liberalize trade regulations, encourage transit through inter-State road and rail routes and deal with other issues are not enough. Resolving border issues has to be a major factor in regional stability.

Unfortunately, situations today in which individual States attempt to pursue their own development at other countries' expense and limit their opportunities are becoming more common. We believe that such trends should have no place in the modern civilized world. In order to truly protect the right to development, it is vital that we ensure that powerful States and transnational corporations do not dictate conditions, limit other countries' development, hinder the implementation of effective projects or, especially, interfere in their internal affairs. In a civilized world no one should prevent development for some States in order to encourage it in others. We believe that any international cooperation should be based on the principles of mutual benefit and respect for each other's interests. In order to achieve that, we believe it is vital to strengthen international law on the right of States to development.

The issue of the relationship between water and power in Central Asia deserves special attention. As we know, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, processes in Central Asia began to disintegrate. Mutually agreed-on arrangements for exchanging water and energy resources collapsed. Despite that, the Kyrgyz Republic has continued to accumulate water in its reservoirs at a time when prices of energy resources supplied by neighbouring countries have been increasing every year. Frankly, it has been a game with only one set of goalposts. In the circumstances, Kyrgyzstan has been obliged to switch to producing affordable, clean electrical power through its hydroelectric plants in order to provide its people with heat and electricity. We still have electricity shortages, especially in winter. Within the framework of its existing relationships, Kyrgyzstan, with its considerable reserves of fresh water, is not adequately compensated economically for the services it renders through its accumulation and storage of water resources that are important to the entire region.

In that connection, we believe that the countries of Central Asia should come to a unified understanding of the meaning and significance of our complex use of water and energy resources. Today the region possesses considerable potential when it comes to achieving a transition to clean energy. Implementing construction projects for hydropower stations in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan could meet the energy needs of every country in the region and thereby create favourable conditions for our sustainable development, while being fully consistent with the provisions of Sustainable Development Goal 7 regarding affordable, clean energy.

Another important factor in Central Asia's regional stability is finding ways to achieve the speedy settlement of border issues based on the principles and norms of international law. We call for using exclusively political and diplomatic means to resolve current regional problems peacefully, in accordance with the principles of international law, mutual understanding and compromise, without the use or threat of use of force. For its part, Kyrgyzstan remains open to dialogue and cooperation with all interested parties.

The role of the United Nations in our combined opposition to today's challenges and threats has grown enormously. However, alongside the Organization's growing importance, its responsibility for taking decisions on the fate of the entire world community has also grown. For all practical purposes, the 15 members of the Security Council currently make decisions about the security issues of every country on the planet. Questions of war and peace, security and stability in every corner of the world depend on the positions

they collectively arrive at. On top of that, the five permanent members of the Security Council can block any decision.

In that regard, we believe that reform of the primary international organ of the United Nations, which should take into account the interests of a much larger majority of States, is long overdue. When the Organization was created and the founding Member States numbered only 50, limiting the membership of the Security Council to 15 was justified. But now there are 193 Member States. We believe that the expansion of democracy should not be confined to States' national borders. The time has come to introduce democratic principles into the election of members of the main organs of the United Nations, including the Security Council.

We should also reform the process for selecting the Secretary-General. We welcome the procedural changes whereby, for the first time in the Organization's 71-year history, all Member States have had the opportunity ahead of time to get to know the candidates for that important position, and their proposed programmes, during consultations. However, we should not stop there. We are in favour of introducing direct elections for the post of Secretary-General through a vote in the General Assembly.

I would like to bring up another problem here. From 20 to 23 September, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) provided a platform for the claims of Kadyrzhan Batyrov, who has been convicted by the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic and sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment for the serious crimes of organizing and fomenting inter-ethnic strife in 2010. In 2013 he was also cited by the Russian Federation in connection with an investigation of large-scale fraud. Kyrgyzstan and the OSCE have cooperated in achieving many brilliant successes. However, the ODIHR policy is fomenting a conflict that could lead to a destabilizing situation and unpredictable consequences in our country.

We are a country that has laboured to begin the process of building parliamentary democracy. We have strictly and scrupulously abided by all the OSCE and ODIHR recommendations, and will continue to do so. We believe that the aforementioned actions of the ODIHR represent a sign of extreme disrespect not only for a State's judicial system but also to the entire people of Kyrgyzstan. We can only see it as a challenge to the Kyrgyz Republic as it treads the thorny, difficult path towards building a genuine democracy. In this way, the annual meetings of ODIHR could become a platform where criminal elements who have committed very serious crimes have the right to speak. If ODIHR acts this way with regard to Kyrgyzstan and other countries today, it is possible that in future it could see representatives of the terrorists of the Islamic State, soaked in the blood of their horrific crimes against humanity, participating in its efforts. The Kyrgyz Republic fully shares the democratic values of the OSCE, and we act to uphold them. However, we categorically reject double standards and the transformation of that organization into an institution of provocation and intervention into the domestic affairs of sovereign States.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm our conviction that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris climate agreement should remain a top priority in the international community's coordinated initiatives. We must ensure that no one be left behind, and especially not the mountainous landlocked developing countries. We must vanquish the destructive forces of terrorism and extremism, which undermine peace and stability throughout the world. In this matter, we need the full cooperation of leading world Powers. They should also stop imposing sanctions on each other, as that affects other countries.

The role of the United Nations in our joint efforts to counter contemporary challenges and threats is becoming increasingly significant. We call for full support for and a strengthening of our Organization to collectively address global challenges to advance sustainable development.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Emmanuel Issoze-Ngondet, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Regional Integration of the Gabonese Republic.

Mr. Issoze-Ngondet (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by conveying my warm congratulations to the President on his brilliant election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. He can be assured of the Gabonese delegation's full support and cooperation throughout his tenure. Allow me to also commend the remarkable work of his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, whose efforts enabled us to

bring new momentum to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted a year ago.

Since then, major events have taken place throughout the world in the areas of politics, the environment, economics and security. As regards politics, this meeting comes in the wake of a disputed presidential election in my country. The final results, which were announced last night, confirmed the re-election of His Excellency Mr. Ali Bongo Ondimba as President of the Republic and Head of State. I would like to take the opportunity to express the gratitude of the Government and people of Gabon to the friendly countries who stood with us. I thank the entire international community for its support during this very sensitive time in the history of Gabon. In order to ensure credible elections that could deliver results acceptable to all political actors, the Government sought to implement specific confidence-building and transparency measures. On its initiative, the Parliament passed the law establishing the use of biometrics in the procedures used in preparing the electoral roll.

The President of the Republic wanted the election to be free, transparent and open. To that end, the Government invited over 1,200 observers and accredited over 200 foreign journalists. Thus, many electoral observer missions, both international and subregional, were deployed throughout the country.

Notwithstanding all these guarantees, the provisional results of the vote made public by the Ministry of the Interior were challenged, sometimes with unprecedented violence, which unfortunately resulted in serious incidents, including the deplorable loss of human lives. The turmoil that this caused at the national and international levels reflected the gravity of the situation. In accordance with legal procedures, appeals were submitted to the competent judicial body, the Constitutional Court. It was the job of the Court, whose decisions cannot be appealed, to confirm or overturn the provisional results. The Court issued its verdict last night, in which it confirmed the re-election of President Ali Bongo Ondimba.

Taking stock of the situation, President Ali Bongo Ondimba has called for an inclusive dialogue, reconciliation and unity. Restoring social cohesion and national unity is the current priority. Maintaining the country's peace and stability is the other challenge we face. My delegation therefore calls on the international community to support it in this effort, with the ultimate goal of strengthening the rule of law, democracy and good governance. In this respect, we will strengthen political and economic governance. The bodies responsible for preventing and settling conflicts nationally — the National Council for Democracy and the Mediator of the Republic — will be provided with substantial resources that will enable them to fulfil their mandates.

I would like to pay a strong and well-deserved tribute to those partners of Gabon, both bilateral and multilateral, who stood beside us before, during and after the election. I am thinking of France, the United States, Morocco and many other friendly countries in Africa and throughout world that spared no efforts in that regard. I am thinking, of course, of the United Nations, the African Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the European Union and many other partners, to which I would like to convey our unending gratitude.

Other major events deserve our attention. They include the widely praised diplomatic rapprochement between the United States and Cuba. It is my hope that the thawing of relations between these two countries will lead to the lifting of the economic embargo. I would also mention the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in Paris. The entire world was pleased to see the signing of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change on 12 December 2015. Thanks to the clear determination of all the countries that took part in this important meeting, the success was commensurate with our expectations. Gabon, strongly committed to countering global warming, made its contribution. The Paris Agreement is a historic turning point in our quest for a more sustainable and caring world. It is not an overstatement to say that it is a great step forward for humankind. We must now show the same determination in implementing it as we did in reaching it.

I note with great satisfaction that the number of countries that have ratified the Agreement is growing. I welcome the remarkable momentum building in the international community, and I would like to believe that the Agreement will enter into force between now and the twenty-second session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 22) to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. As far as Gabon is concerned, we have already begun the process of ratification. We will

do our utmost to deposit our instrument of ratification as soon as possible.

It is difficult today to speak of the results of COP 21 without mentioning the challenges facing the twenty-second session. COP 22 is seen as an extension of COP 21. It will be held in Morocco, with a central focus on the issue of energy development in Africa. Two thirds of Africans are without electricity — an injustice that we must mobilize to remedy. It is time to apply ourselves jointly to the realization of all of our intitiatives and all our announced agendas. Gabon welcomes the mobilization of Morocco and its commitment to the success of COP 22, especially in view of the parties' envisaged adoption of urgent measures within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That goes to show the value that Gabon attaches to environmental issues, which are at the heart of the Agenda and which we adopted at the seventieth session of the General Assembly in this very Hall.

At a time when we are rocked by economic, social and political crises, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents today a new push to transform our world. It is therefore important that the enthusiasm surrounding the adoption of the 2030 Agenda be reflected in action in order to accelerate its implementation. That is the major challenge the international community will face over the coming years.

The poverty eradication, conservation of the environment and sharing of prosperity to which we all aspire are requirements that call for a greater mobilization of human and financial resources, together with increased involvement on the part of the private sector. I mention the mobilization of human resources because people must remain at the centre of our policies and actions. For that reason, the involvement of all actors is more than critical. By "actors", I mean young people, women, persons with disabilities, refugees, migrants, civil society and the private sector.

The mobilization of financial resources is needed because the implementation of the SDGs requires that we meet a whole set of needs. We must therefore redouble our creativity and find new sources of financing, so as not to repeat the errors associated with the implementation of Millennium Development Goals. The private sector needs to be mobilized and involved because it plays a key role with regard to productivity, economic growth, job creation and wealth creation. It is therefore time for the private sector to play a larger role in tackling the challenges linked to sustainable development.

I wish to reassure everybody that Gabon will continue its unflagging efforts when it comes to tackling the problems posed by sustainable development and finding new ways of managing our economies. In that regard, our Government created the Investment and Export Promotion Agency, which is required to come up with harmonious strategies to improve our business climate and to implement strict and appropriate management methods with regard to our natural resources. The Agency is also responsible for designing and implementing a sectoral approach that focuses on initial processing at the local level and rational management of our environment. We felt it was necessary to modify our traditional economic approach by integrating into it a new, sustainable balance between our people and our environment and also a space-time dimension with respect to development. That approach is designed to address the growing gap between poor and rich and to anticipate and avert the consequences, for the environment and for future generations, of poorly controlled or uncontrolled growth.

As, I think, everyone will agree, if we are to fulfil our commitments in respect of sustainable development and tackling climate change, we need a peaceful society. For that reason my country approves any initiative that will ensure peace and security within our borders, in the subregion of Central Africa, and throughout the entire world. The concept of peace is a constant that has always characterized the experience of the people of Gabon. Hence, Gabon actively participates in the fight against terrorism, which operates in various parts of the world indiscriminately. The presence of Gabon at the Second Regional Security Summit for Africa, held in Abuja in May, is proof of our commitment to a world without terrorism. The decline in the activities of Boko Haram in the Chad Basin prove that the synergy of our efforts is paying off.

The fight against an enemy that is asymmetrical is far from having been won. Despite increased cooperation and significant resources deployed on the ground, and although we have raised our levels of alertness and added to the capabilities of our special forces, small terrorist groups are proving to be resilient and are displaying an unprecedented capacity for doing harm.

In both Syria and Iraq, the so-called Islamic State — in spite of being weakened — still has sufficient financial and technical means to challenge the international coalition. We must, therefore, do all we can to deplete its sources of supply.

If we are to overcome the terrorist threat, we must first resolve the conflicts in Libya and Syria. I need hardly remind those present that the current chaos has become fertile ground for the nebulous terrorists to operate and to expand their destabilizing activities. The migratory crisis, which is unprecedented, is also being stoked by the conflicts in Libya and Syria. As we have repeatedly said, the only alternative to these crises is a political solution arrived at through negotiation. Any military solution should be in keeping with that approach.

Poaching and trafficking of all types also constitute threats to our collective peace and security. My country welcomes the second General Assembly resolution to tackle poaching (resolution 70/301), adopted on 9 September 2016. My country is particularly concerned about the lack of progress in the general and complete disarmament process, as it is about the paralysis of the multilateral disarmament mechanisms. The resumption of work requires that all Member States recommit their efforts. Maintaining the status quo is not a viable solution.

The prevailing and persistent impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is also not viable. The lack of constructive dialogue serves neither the cause of Israel's security nor that of bringing about a stable and prosperous Palestinian State. On the contrary, it serves only to heighten tensions, distrust and insecurity. We believe that any lasting solution that is acceptable to all has to emerge from direct negotiations between the concerned parties, not from unilateral approaches. We reaffirm Gabon's support for France's proposal regarding the convening of a conference, before the year's end, at which the Israelis and the Palestinians would be able to resume negotiations.

As for Moroccan Sahara, there is still the option of a negotiated political solution. In my view, it is the best way forward if we are to break the deadlock that has been in place for several years. My country reiterates its support for the Moroccan initiative, which we believe is realistic and capable of leading, under the aegis of the United Nations, to a lasting settlement of that issue.

In closing, allow me to pay a heartfelt tribute to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, whose mandate is coming to an end. I thank him for his tireless and constant efforts to uphold the noble aims of the Organization and for the many initiatives he has led with a view to realizing the projects and ambitions of the United Nations for the world. I thank him for everything he has done during the ten years he has spent at the helm of our Secretariat. On behalf of Gabon, my delegation welcomes the reforms he has brought about in our Organization, which will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on the world. It thanks him for his leadership on issues as important as climate change, migration flows, humanitarian assistance, questions of peace and security, and the reform of the Security Council.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Francine Baron, Minister for Foreign Affairs and CARICOM Affairs of the Commonwealth of Dominica.

Ms. Baron (Dominica): Last year, when this body met, we resolved collectively to take global action to transform our world in a manner that would bring about sustainable and equitable development. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has set the stage for increasing international discourse and action in our fight against inequality, to combat climate change, to empower our citizens, to protect the vulnerable and to improve the lives of billions of people across the globe.

Today, Dominica, like other small island developing States (SIDS), remains motivated and committed to achieving the SDGs. For my country, the realization of the SDGs is not simply about ticking boxes. Fundamentally, it is about making a real and meaningful difference in the lives of our citizens. However, in order for those essential changes to take place, we must each do more at the national level, and all countries must deliver on their commitments in accordance with their respective means. That effort will require more structured and effective partnerships.

Additionally, as we focus our minds on the SDGs, we must also sharpen our focus on the impact that climate change continues to have on the development of SIDS. In the past few years, we have witnessed a dramatic reduction in agricultural production. We are also experiencing more severe and prolonged droughts, often followed by sudden and high volumes of rainfall, which result in massive soil erosion and catastrophic loss and damage.

Likewise, the ongoing phenomenon of beach erosion and destruction of coral reefs — so vital to our tourism product and the character of our islands — risks untold damage to our prized tourism assets. Consequently, the economic impact on SIDS is dire. More urgent and wide-ranging action is needed in the fight against climate change to ensure our very survival. To that end, we look forward to building on the momentum of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change as we move on to the twenty-second session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Marrakesh later this year.

As many will recall, a little over a year ago the Commonwealth of Dominica was painfully reminded of the devastating impact of climate change. In less than 24 hours, Tropical Storm Erika took the lives of 30 Dominicans and wreaked havoc on our country's physical and social infrastructure. That single climatic event caused damage estimated at EC$1.3 billion, or $483 million, which accounted for 90 per cent of the island's gross domestic product.

One year on, we are making great strides and are on track to build back better and to build increasingly climate-resilient and adaptive infrastructure. While we commend the Dominicans — at home and abroad — for their support and dedication, our progress has been made easier through the partnership and support of our bilateral and multilateral partners. We therefore take this opportunity to thank them publicly for their invaluable contribution to our rebuilding efforts.

I can say that Dominica's experience with Tropical Storm Erika is all too common in the lives of SIDS. We continue to suffer the disproportionate burden and impact of climate change, which also severely undermines our efforts at sustainable development. Also troubling are the slow-onset events and the extreme weather events that are brought on as a result of climate change. These are expected to become more frequent and more destructive. What that means for us, in real terms, is that limited resources, which should be targeted at transformative and sustainable development, of necessity have to be continuously shifted to post-disaster rehabilitation.

That is why Dominica continues its call for collaboration in the establishment of an international natural disaster risk fund, to provide timely financial support to SIDS affected by natural disasters. The current Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility within the Caribbean Development Bank for Caribbean SIDS, the International Monetary Fund's support for disaster recovery and the World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery are good starting points. Regrettably, in the face of the enormous challenge, their funding levels remain vastly insufficient. We would be encouraged if the capitalization of this special natural disaster risk fund were to come from the parties to annex I of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and other major emitters, including voluntary contributors. We believe that such a facility would enable SIDS to access and secure funds in a more predictable and timely manner and to rebuild more robust infrastructure through effective technical assistance and physical development planning. It would also help these climate-vulnerable countries to build increasingly climate-resilient economies and to identify vulnerable areas that need to be adapted and mitigated to better deal with any future catastrophic event.

The Government of Dominica is also taking effective steps at the national level to improve its ability to respond and deliver in post-disaster situations. This year, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit outlined a proposal to establish a national vulnerability risk and resilience fund. The fund aims to ensure that the Government has immediate access to financial resources in the event of a natural disaster. The fund would also be used to finance climate-resilient projects and programmes. The capitalization of the fund will come from Government revenue and returns from the Government's investments in renewable energy projects that have already been implemented with grants and concessionary financing through the Green Climate Fund. Two projects have already been identified: the geothermal energy project and a national waste-to-energy project.

Today's interconnectedness of global markets make access to the global financial system a prerequisite to economic development and a sine qua non for sustainable development. The free movement of goods and services depends on the ability of the public and private sectors to move financial resources throughout the world. Therefore, recent actions taken by several international banks in the United States and across Europe to terminate correspondent banking relations with indigenous banks in the Caribbean have made it difficult for the Caribbean to do business with the rest of the world. The consequences are far-reaching. It has

affected the transmission of remittances, undermined foreign investments, restricted the repatriation of profits and restricted our national and indigenous banks' ability to participate effectively in the international financial systems, even though they have not been found guilty of any financial or security breaches.

The Governments of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have long recognized and supported the need for common global action against the financing of terrorism, money laundering, organized crime and other illegal activities. Our countries have worked diligently with non-regional Governments and international institutions like the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering and the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force and have instituted domestic legislation to fight money laundering, restrict the financing of terrorism and seize the proceeds of crime.

Our leaders acknowledge that the de-risking of correspondent banks is a direct response to the regulatory requirements imposed by those jurisdictions in which they operate. We want to see action to remedy its harmful effects on us. The unintended consequences threaten our very economic survival. The solution lies, we believe, in meaningful dialogue between and among States. Through dialogue, we hope to see the creation of rules-based standards and mechanisms that govern the establishment and maintenance of correspondent banking relationships and regulatory changes under which the respondent banks, instead of correspondent banks, would be sanctioned for violations in connection with anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism, thereby removing the burden of compliance from the latter.

Like most challenges of global magnitude, that calls for strong international partnerships. One such partnership is the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, which we believe presents a blueprint for such modalities. It also highlights durable and genuine partnerships as a cornerstone for achieving the SDGs in SIDS. Additionally, we believe that South-South, North-South and Triangular cooperation have served and will continue to serve as an effective platform for technology transfer and capacity-building. We thank our developed country partners, which continue to play a major role in our development and in our efforts to realize the SDGs. Over the years, those countries have stood steadfastly with us in our commitment to improve the lives of our people. Assistance with developing sustainable agriculture, tourism and energy, especially with geothermal energy development, have set the platform for sustainable social and economic development, while at the same time combating climate change.

We strongly believe, however, that an effective strategy to realize the SDGs will require an overhaul of the manner in which official development assistance (ODA) is executed. ODA must be more informed by the realities in the recipient countries, more predictable, and accessible in a timely manner. For instance, the very unrealistic and arbitrary classification of several small island developing States as middle-income countries, based on the flawed notion of gross domestic product per capita, is yet another way in which the efforts of small countries at building economic resilience and sustainable development are systematically undermined. It is a tendency that completely obscures the reality in SIDS and ignores their inherent characteristics of vulnerability. We will continue to draw attention to the unsuitability of those categorizations.

At the same time, SIDS will continue to explore opportunities within the framework of South-South cooperation. We have recently been encouraged by the increasing levels of partnership among and between countries of the South. The role of China has become integral to South-South cooperation, and China has demonstrated its willingness and capacity to assist developing countries in critical areas of development. These have included funding for and the construction of essential physical infrastructure, as well as providing assistance in the form of equipment, the delivery of health-care services and human resources development.

Equally, countries such as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Cuba continue to make a durable and significant impact on the health care, education and energy landscape of Dominica. Cuba has the capacity to make an even greater contribution to our region and the world, once the economic embargo is lifted. Dominica is encouraged by the recent improvement in relations between the Republic of Cuba and the United States of America. We applaud President Obama's initiative as progressive and worthy of international support. The critical next step, however, should be the removal of all other impediments to trade and economic activities, so that Cuba can fully benefit from the international trading and financial systems.

Even in the face of its own domestic challenges, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela continues to be

a reliable partner in development. Our partnership with the Bolivarian Republic, especially over the past decade, has contributed significantly to our own tangible achievements under the Millennium Development Goals through initiatives such as the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America and the PetroCaribe Energy Cooperation Agreement. We look forward to our continued partnership and hope for a peaceful and amicable resolution of its current difficulties. A peaceful and stable hemisphere is in the interest of all of us.

Within the Caribbean subregion, we continue to strengthen and deepen both bilateral and multilateral partnerships to promote development and our effort to achieve the SDGs. The role of regional institutions like CARICOM and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States has become even more essential in terms of social and economic development. That is why we have built institutions that serve the people of our region in every aspect of development. Our regional approach to our common challenges has also garnered better results than if we were to face them individually. CARICOM now provides a critical interface with our development partners in trade, energy, and social and economic development.

In the area of energy, CARICOM has adopted and is currently implementing the Caribbean Sustainable Energy Roadmap and Strategy. The goal of the Roadmap and Strategy is to transform the energy sectors of the member States by providing secure and sustainable supplies of clean, reliable and affordable energy with stable prices in order to better position the Caribbean Community to achieve the SDGs. As a result, CARICOM has been partnering with other countries and organizations, both formally and informally, to assist its members.

One such partnership exists with the Government of Austria, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the SIDS Sustainable Energy and Climate Resilience Initiative to create the Caribbean Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency. The Centre will serve as a hub for coordinating Caribbean-wide renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes. We expect it to play a major role in the implementation of the CARICOM energy policies.

Given its paramount importance to the future prosperity and sustainable development of the SIDS, I would like briefly to highlight SDG 14, which refers to protection of our seas, oceans and marine resources. The world's oceans and seas are sources of nourishment and nutrition to billions, a major tourism asset and an important part of our complex ecosystem. International actions to protect the health of our oceans and seas should be pursued as a matter of urgency. Small and large countries should come together to coordinate efforts and to create a system to regulate activities that affect our oceans and seas.

We commend the efforts and initiatives taken by the Friends of the Oceans group, the Government of Italy and, most recently, United States Secretary of State John Kerry. The recent Our Ocean Conference in Washington, D.C., like its predecessors, highlighted the need to draw greater attention to the ongoing destruction of our oceans resulting from marine pollution and its implications for humankind. We need innovative and global responses. We must also improve public awareness and education on marine pollution and highlight the best practices to protect our oceans.

In that regard, we commend the efforts of representatives and countries advancing the We Are The Oceans concept. Dominica is happy to associate with this initiative, which promotes food security, sustainable consumption and production, ocean conservation and biodiversity as a way to meet, or even exceed, the commitments made by our leaders. We are The Oceans holds great potential for making the issue of our seas and oceans one of the most extensive educational initiatives of the SDGs. We urge Member States to join and to work collectively to save our planet for future generations. Collectively, we have the ability to solve the most difficult challenges of our time

The unprecedented pace of human advancement in the twenty-first century has demonstrated that we have the capacity and ingenuity to combat climate change and to develop means of production and consumption to sustain humankind, while at the same time protecting our planet.

Our efforts to save our planet and to improve the lives of billions of people throughout the world — people who suffer from hunger and starvation and those who continue to be marginalized — will be pointless without peace and security. The destruction wrought by wars within and between countries continues to displace millions of people from their homes, creating an unprecedented refugee crisis.

The threat posed by nuclear weapons, and especially by the determination of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to develop weapons with the ability to kill millions, is a major threat not only to the neighbours of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea but to people everywhere. The United Nations must, without hesitation, take strong and decisive action to pursue diplomatic solutions to end the war in Syria and to eliminate the nuclear capability of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Similarly, we must, as a matter of urgency, work together to defeat the increasing threat of global terrorism. It is up to us to take the necessary actions.

The meeting rose at 2.45 p.m.

United Nations A/71/PV.21

General Assembly

Seventy-first session

Official Records

21st plenary meeting
Saturday, 24 September 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Thomson ..... (Fiji)

governmentgIn the absence of the President, Ms. Young (Belize), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Perfecto Rivas Yasay Jr., Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines.

Mr. Yasay (the Philippines): On behalf of the Philippine Government and the Filipino people, I wish to convey our warmest congratulations to Ambassador Peter Thomson on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. I also wish to commend him for choosing a theme that resonates very well among Member States and partners. The theme, "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world", strongly reaffirms the raison d'être of the United Nations.

The Philippines is one of the founding Members of the Organization. For more than seven decades, our engagement and partnership with the United Nations has been a riveting story of our aspirations as a people, born of our colonial past and our independent present. With its central and strategic role, the United Nations remains a relevant and important platform where all nations can make that decisive push to empower us all to achieve and sustain our development agenda, which has the interests of our peoples at its core.

Today, the Philippines is once again privileged to renew its commitment to the cause of peace, security and sustainable development through key priority areas and advocacies identified in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The global action to transform our world illuminates the urgency and importance of our efforts in the Philippines to explore new horizons and break new ground, anchored in our unremitting commitment as a democracy to the rule of law and the well-being of our sovereign people and to our desire to remain a responsible partner in the international community.

The guiding principles and core values enshrined in the Constitution of the Philippines include the sanctity of human life, the inalienable rights of each person, the supremacy of the law, freedom, equality, peace, justice and the nation's right to self-determination. Among the country's mandates is the pursuit of an independent foreign policy designed to promote national interests. With our hard-fought and hard-won independence, we have valued and zealously guarded our rights and liberties. To prevent abuse and unwanted excesses, the checks and balances of our democratic institutions are actively at play. They range from the three highly independent branches of government — the Supreme Court, the Congress and the Executive Branch — to the open and free press and civil society groups committed to guaranteeing the freedom and prosperity of every Filipino.

Those fundamental and time-honoured principles and values give rise to the solemn duty of our people to choose their leaders. In turn, the Government has

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the obligation to fervently defend the people's rights and liberties. Reneging on that responsibility places the Government at risk of being removed by popular initiatives, including People Power — a glorious event in the Philippines that is admired and remembered around the world.

Five months ago, our people, through our nation's democratic principles and processes, elected a new leader. President Rodrigo Roa Duterte triumphed in the democratic elections with an unprecedented and resounding electoral mandate. The Filipino people, proud of their democratic values, traditions and heritage, have spoken. Their vote is an unmistakable call for a deepening of our democracy, where our people will truly be liberated from the shackles of fear, conflict, poverty and injustice. Their choice represents the expressed wish of the people to revitalize the entire country as a sovereign equal among the community of nations. Their sacred ballots cast an unequivocal and resounding voice for change and for tearing down antiquated political and economic structures that have continued to generate and perpetuate numerous inequalities. They voted for the renewal of our communities and our society, for a life of constancy, dignity and honour.

In his address to the nation, President Duterte declared that the rule of law and the respect for due process will prevail at all times. Clearly, we will be guided by established norms and procedures under the law to deliver on the strong mandate given to the President by the Filipino electorate.

For far too long, the Philippines has been unable to fully advance because of corruption in high and low places, the worsening crime situation and the prevalence of illegal drugs. Our people recognize the peril that those evils pose to our development and our democracy. Corruption has become the breeding ground for the illegal drug trade, which seriously threatens the country's peace and order. Furthermore, corruption impedes our sustainable development goals. It has torn apart many of our communities, destroyed families and snuffed out the hopes and dreams of our people, young and old, for a bright future. For that reason, we are determined to free the Philippines from corrupt and other outdated practices as we eradicate illicit drugs and their manufacture, distribution and use in the country. The rule of law and strict adherence to due process fully governs our campaign against corruption and criminality, including the fight against illegal drugs.

Our firm belief in the supremacy of the law is given concrete expression through the State policy, enshrined in the Constitution, to fully respect human rights and the value and dignity of every person. We even have an independent Human Rights Commission tasked to investigate and prosecute all human rights violations in the country. That national commitment is amplified internationally, as the Philippines is party to eight of the nine core international human rights conventions. We recognize that a secure, stable, and prosperous Philippines will require a secure and stable rules-based international order to which it must faithfully comply.

With the imperative to forge policies for our people aimed at achieving enduring peace and prosperity and at restoring trust in the Government's ability to protect their fundamental rights and freedoms, the President, going into his third month in office, enjoys a 92 per cent rate of approval and trust from the Filipino people. To him, that trust is sacrosanct; under no circumstances can it be breached, under no circumstance must it be compromised.

Our actions have, however, grabbed both national headlines and international attention for all the wrong reasons. Consequently, we urge everyone to allow us to deal with our domestic challenges so that we can achieve our national goals without undue interference and so that we can be among the community of nations that can collectively make a universal push to transform our world and improve the quality of life for all of humanity, including the more than 100 million Filipinos. We urge everyone to have faith in the strong institutions of our democracy and in our people to defend the freedom and integrity of our country, and in the power of our people as they continue to freely participate, be involved and have a say in the actions and decisions of their democratically elected Government.

Let me repeat, explicitly and unequivocally, that the Philippines is committed to the rule of law and the protection of the rights of all Filipinos. With that abiding commitment, we are pursuing our efforts within the existing democratic and legal framework, which is governed by the overriding principle to uphold the dignity of every person and the right to due process and to the presumption of innocence. For the law to be credible, respected and effective, it has to be consistent and fair. The full force of the law will be applied at all

times to serve the ends of justice, and not just those of a select few. There will be no double standard, no application of selective justice.

Our campaign to rid the country of criminality, lawlessness and disorder, including our all-out war against illicit drugs, will remain strictly in accordance with the Philippine Constitution and the international norms and human rights treaties and covenants that we are party to. We have not empowered and never will empower our law-enforcement agents to shoot to kill individuals suspected of drug crimes. And yet, under our established rules of engagement, our police have the right to defend themselves when their lives are threatened. Extrajudicial killing has no place in our society nor in our criminal justice system.

Our sustainable goals rest on the fundamentals of development, that is, human development. The path of change that we seek is grounded in the most enduring of precepts, namely, our own national interest, which addresses the immediate needs of the Filipino people. Our goals are guided by our article of faith that we leave no one behind in our development strides. We are working hard to ensure that each and every Filipino will be able to keep in step with the overall development pace.

The Philippines continues to enhance the delivery and quality of basic social services to our people, anchored in the implementation of what we view as a human approach to development and governance. We have benchmarked such services to global standards. That is true of our health, education, food, water and housing services. Environmental preservation, respect for culture and the pursuit of social justice form key components of our national development frameworks.

Since 2013, the Philippines has made public its support for the core pillars of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Philippines is honoured to be one of the 22 pioneer countries that volunteered at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to share its initiatives in the first year of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

If we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in 15 years, we need to take a risk-informed approach. It is axiomatic to say that frequent and intense natural disasters can negate our gains in the reduction of poverty and even push back development.

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries. It is also vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change owing to many years of neglect and selfish practices by various countries. This has left us far behind in progress, because of their irresponsibility and greed at our expense. We reiterate our call for climate justice and the principle of equity and common but differentiated responsibility in the implementation of the obligations under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The Philippines will remain a responsible partner of the international community. Our domestic concerns compel us to partner with like-minded countries in the areas of maritime security, counter-terrorism, disaster response and transnational crime such as, but not limited to, trafficking in drugs and humans. Our commitment to the rule of law, peace, our people and our relations with the international community also extends to the recent decision of the Arbitral Tribunal of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague with regard to disputes in the South China Sea. The decision has upheld the primacy of international law as the cornerstone for a rules-based regional and international order. The arbitral award, which is final and binding on all parties, is a clearly established legal fact that is now part of international jurisprudence in the maritime domain, in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

We reaffirm our abiding commitment to pursue the peaceful resolution and management of disputes with a view to promoting and enhancing peace and stability in the region. We need to fully respect legal and diplomatic processes as we explore the best way forward. We reaffirm the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence. We must not overlook the importance of non-militarization and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities, including maintaining the freedom of navigation, the full and effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and the adoption of an effective code of conduct.

Over the past 71 years, the United Nations has demonstrated continuing resilience and relevance in the face of intractable challenges and emerging regional threats, both traditional and non-traditional. With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations has rightly returned development to the centre of global efforts to pursue peace, security and stability.

The Philippines, as a founding Member of the United Nations, walks with and works with the community of nations in truly transforming our world, where the universal values of equality, tolerance and human dignity must prevail. As we reason together in this honoured Hall of the United Nations, let us together move our development goals forward. For us to build our future, we must honour our past. As we reaffirm our common humanity, we have to keep faith with one another as we advance our noblest and highest aspirations based on our collective will and pursue our varying and often disparate national interests.

Despite the odds and the complex challenges, we must press on, with courage and fortitude, for the sake of our peoples and seize the promise of a better tomorrow for future generations. Let us not forget — to borrow the words of a distinguished member of humankind — that in our determination to transform the world, it is not enough to see things as they are and ask, "Why?" Let us all dream of things that never were and ask, "Why not?"

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates.

Sheikh Al Nahyan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I am pleased to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session and to reaffirm the United Arab Emirates' support for his efforts during his term. I would also like to express my thanks and appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for his wise leadership during the previous session.

In our region and beyond, several countries have confronted multiple ongoing crises and conflicts since 2011. A number of Arab countries, including Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Syria and Somalia, have descended into internal fighting. At the same time, the plight of the Palestinian people persists under Israeli occupation without a just solution on the horizon, one that could restore the rights stripped from the Palestinians and establish their State based on the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Furthermore, regional interference in Arab affairs, perpetrated mainly by Iran — the only country in the world with a Constitution that explicitly calls for the export of its revolution — has aggravated conflicts in the region. The past few years have shown that solutions based on crisis management are ineffective. Therefore, joint international efforts must focus on resolving the crises and conflicts — not just managing them.

We are all aware of the violence and terrorism around us, which have taken unprecedented forms, relying on heinous methods and causing fear and terror not only in the Middle East, but also in many countries worldwide. That demonstrates that violence and terrorism must no longer be associated with a single State or region, as they are global threats that recognize no borders. The serious challenges facing our region and many other countries require our joint consideration of ways to address them and reach consensual, timely, effective solutions, without undermining the ongoing significant efforts in that regard.

Countering terrorist groups is a right and duty of all States. However, resorting to laws that ignore the effective role played by a number of States in counter-terrorism would lead to suffering in many States. In that respect, we recall the so-called Justice against Sponsors of Terrorism Act in the United States of America, which has resulted in arbitrary policies and the destabilization of existing strong relationships among allies. I will attempt to present some thoughts on ways to diagnose the crises and determine potential solutions.

For example, Iraq has been suffering for more than a decade from nearly daily acts of sectarian violence. In addition, a part of its territory is under the control of terrorist groups, thus spreading fear and terror in the hearts of the Iraqi people and undermining the region's integrity. Moreover, interference by Iran in Iraq's internal affairs has exacerbated divisiveness among the Iraqi people. Yet there is no comprehensive political solution that can promote consensus among the Iraqi people and put an end to the marginalization of whole sections of Iraqi society.

What have the effective Powers done in that regard? What have the prominent Powers capable of addressing those serious crises done? Those Powers, or so-called super-Powers, have simply tried to minimize the impact without resolving the crisis. That approach has merely made the crises increasingly complex, with the collapse of State institutions and the emergence of terrorism and extremism. That has led to the high price being paid, especially in terms of the loss of life on the part of the region's children, as well as their futures.

We find that Iran, as a result of its expansionist regional policies, has led the region to the brink of

disaster. Through its constant interference in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries, it has played the greatest role in causing tension and instability in the region. Despite the so-called nuclear agreement reached between Tehran and the P5+1 — which was welcomed by countries in the region in the hope that the deal would change Iran's hostile approach — and despite all of the optimistic expectations, we have faced a different reality in that Iran has wasted no time in pursuing efforts to undermine regional security through aggressive rhetoric, blatant interference, the training and arming of militias and the development of its ballistic missile programme. Iran has been designated a State sponsor of terrorism, in itself quite alarming. Yet, despite all of the above, Tehran has refused to rescind its policies, which means that in order to confront and solve the crises, we must deal with Iran's behaviour.

A further example of that trend can be seen in the decision of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to develop its nuclear and ballistic capacities and carry out regular testing, which threatens its neighbours' security, as well as international peace and security, and is clearly contrary to the most fundamental rules of international law. The same can be said of the crises in Libya, Syria, Yemen and Somalia. The lack of awareness of those crises and the lack of timely responses aimed at preventing the exacerbation of the suffering of many people are evident in the current developments in the Arab region, where the repercussions of certain crises have gone beyond borders.

The ensuing refugee crisis and mass exodus from conflict areas and the consequent pressures on many countries have indicated the need to work together within and beyond our region to develop solutions that rise above individual interests. That provides yet another example of how ignoring crises or settling for managing them, rather than finding tangible solutions, has further exacerbated the crises and transformed the situation into one that is more complex and compartmentalized.

Despite the gravity of the crises that we all face, finding solutions is not impossible, if the international community and interested sides demonstrate good will and the political determination to resolve them. Allow me, in that regard, to offer the following thoughts:

First, solutions must be based on justice and respect for the law. Without exception, no role should be given to any extremist, terrorist or evil party or group under any circumstances. We call on Iran and all regional parties to abandon the evil role that they are playing, which incites sectarianism and further ignites tension. Secondly, we must attempt to resolve some of the fundamental crises in a number of countries in the region, which is key to finding solutions to other crises, particularly in Yemen and Libya.

In Yemen, there have been a number of initiatives, including an effective road map put forward by the legitimate Government of Yemen, now in Kuwait, and at the Quartet meeting held in Jeddah in August, that could have saved the Yemeni people from their suffering. We hope that those efforts can result in a political solution — if the intentions of the militias in Yemen are sincere and if they live up to the standards of the international community and uphold their responsibilities as Yemeni nationals.

The United Arab Emirates also welcomes the Skhirat Agreement reached by the parties in Libya, as well as the formation of the Government of National Accord. We hope that it will lead to constitution-building in Libya and strengthen cooperation between the Presidential Council and the House of Representatives, which are the legitimate representatives of the Libyan people. That would result in a more unified Libyan national Administration capable of protecting Libya's territorial integrity and maintaining the unity of the people.

The United Arab Emirates sees no possibility of resolving the Syrian crisis through anything other than a political solution. There is no possibility of resolving it through military force. To date, that path has only intensified the suffering of the fraternal people of Syria and led to increased flows of refugees to other countries. The crisis has been further complicated by interference on the part of Iran and its terrorist militias in Syrian affairs. That has distorted the vision for Syria and derailed it from the existing path.

Our hearts bleed when we see the brotherly people of Syria attempting to flee from death. We are deeply saddened that the Syrian people, known for their dignity and ancient civilization, are forced by the ongoing fighting in their country to fall into the hands of an unknown fate, a fate that began with forced displacement, with no end in sight. In addition, they experience humiliation as they are turned away from the borders of other countries. The repercussions of the Syrian crisis — and the impact of violence,

displacement and an uncertain future — will affect future generations of Syrians.

These examples affirm the regional view that settling for crisis management, repeating charitable humanitarian efforts or holding recurring international conferences will not substitute for solving those crises.

Despite the complexity of the crises overtaking our region, there is still hope for overcoming and resolving them. That is evident in the solutions adopted by the United Arab Emirates and the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which will, we hope, have a positive impact on other countries in the region. The United Arab Emirates firmly believes in the values of justice, international law, human rights and good governance. We wish to provide an enhanced environment of happiness for our citizens and residents. We believe that true development does not focus solely on the economic factors but also on the people themselves, based on the principles of tolerance, the acceptance of others and equality for all.

The empowerment of women is a central policy in my country, based on a belief in the pioneering societal role they play. The education of our citizens is also a priority, and we have developed policies and legislation to reflect that. We believe that the essential framework to achieve those goals should be based on protecting the State, in particular from extremism and sectarianism. That would solidify and strengthen our State against factors of disintegration and collapse that have threatened other countries in the region.

In that regard, we have established the Hedayah Centre to counter extremism and have participated with the United States in the establishment of the Sawab Centre. Additionally, the Muslim Council of Elders and the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies were established to show the true face of Islam. Those institutions aim to protect young people who have been attracted by extremist, sectarian and terrorist groups and counter the false claims of such groups.

The crisis in our region should not distract us from our core national cause, which is United Arab Emirates sovereignty over its three islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, which are being occupied by Iran against the provisions of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. My country has called on our neighbour Iran time and time again to return those occupied islands to their rightful owner, the United Arab Emirates, either voluntarily through peaceful means or through international justice and arbitration, in order to maintain friendly, neighbourly relations in the Persian Gulf. We will never give up our sovereign right over those islands, and our approach is based on the principles of international law.

Our faith in the role of the United Nations and its organs, especially the Security Council, in maintaining international peace and security is unwavering. We expect the United Nations to play an effective and vital role in resolving conflicts, strengthening the ability of States to resolve conflicts through a framework based on respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

TTo enable the Security Council to carry out that role, the Council members need to work together for the benefit and well-being of our region. In order to ensure that the United Nations is effective in a multipolar world, we must grant the General Assembly a greater role and pay more attention to early planning so as to promote security and stability. We can do that through constructive strategies and programmes that aim to achieve sustainable development, eradicate poverty, fight inequality, address climate change, defend human rights and much more.

We are firmly convinced that the effectiveness of the United Nations and its principal organs can be achieved through institutional cooperation with regional organizations, using clear mechanisms of cooperation, and that such cooperation is the cornerstone of the United Nations work.

The United Arab Emirates looks forward to working with the incoming Secretary-General with a view to promoting the work and effectiveness of the United Nations, so as to ensure further progress and find solutions to conflicts, as well as build the capacities required to maintain international peace and security.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Ahmed Abd al-Aziz Ghandour, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Sudan.

Mr. Ghandour (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*)**:** It is my great pleasure, in my personal capacity as well as on behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of the Sudan, to convey my desire for the successful outcome of these deliberations during this important session of the General Assembly. Our agenda is one of hope for a better and more prosperous future. We must

consider the issues of peace and security, development, human rights, and humanitarian matters in particular.

It is also my pleasure to express my congratulations to Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. I would also like to express our gratitude to Mr. Mogens Lykketoft for the skilful and wise manner in which he led the work of the Assembly at the previous session.

The high-level general debate of this session is taking place under the theme "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world". That reflects the interest of the United Nations in realizing the hopes and aspirations of our countries and our peoples, in achieving sustainable development and prosperity for future generations, in eradicating poverty and disparities among people, and in protecting our planet and promoting sustainable development through international partnerships, where all stakeholders are involved. We hope that all stakeholders will respect their commitments to achieve that objective in order to avoid the repercussions of poverty, for we are aware that poverty, regardless of where it is, threatens prosperity throughout the world.

My country today reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. We reaffirm our interest in the need to continue efforts to reform this institution and develop its structures. We hope that the regional coalitions calling for General Assembly and Security Council reform do not go unheeded, so that the United Nations can truly become a platform for the implementation of international legality and a guarantor of justice and development throughout our world. I would like to reaffirm my country's commitment to dialogue with the international community aimed at strengthening values such as international justice and the fight against impunity through international mechanisms that are neither selective nor politicized.

In our view it is clear that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which should seek to enforce justice throughout the world, in fact hinders peace in its practical reality. That can be seen in the regions where it undertakes action, particularly in Africa. The African States therefore call for the drafting of a plan to collectively withdraw from the ICC. It is crucial that a distinction be drawn between justice and the politicization of justice.

To achieve peace, we have to strive to work together. This is one of our favourite topics. I would like to express our gratitude to all those who have endeavoured to achieve this very noble objective. Furthermore, I can confirm that we are going to knock on every single door of peace, and dialogue will be the only solution. Accordingly, my Government has spared no effort to ensure that peace prevails. Today, we are strengthening our social fabric and continuing our efforts aimed at rebuilding my country.

Thanks to God and thanks to the determination of my country and of the loyal people of the Sudan, Darfur has become a safe region, where peace and security have prevailed. The United Nations is a witness to this fact. The Government of the Sudan calls for the implementation of the plan for the withdrawal of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). I would like to reaffirm from this high rostrum that the Government of the Sudan reiterates its call to have UNAMID forces withdraw, for there are no more reasons for their presence there. Those forces could be deployed elsewhere to serve to consolidate peace in the parts of the world that truly need it.

The theme of the general debate of this session is "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world". To achieve the objectives, purposes and principles implicit in this theme, we need to act together.

We also need to act together to achieve genuine momentum in bridging the food gap around the world. In this regard, I would like to recall the food security initiative launched by the President of the Republic, Mr. Omar Hassan Al-Bashir, during the third Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, in 2013. This initiative, which was subsequently adopted at the Sharm El-Sheikh summit in 2016, serves as one of the pillars for food security around the world. I call upon the United Nations and all specialized agencies to carry out the necessary studies to ensure the success of this initiative. We in the Sudan possess the necessary capabilities and skills to move forward on this universal push and stand ready to do so.

We wish to fulfil our commitments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals with a view to guaranteeing a dignified life for all. But given the unjustified unilateral sanctions and the burden of our foreign debt, which stands at over $40 billion, that will

not be easy. When one looks at the interest to be paid and the very complex contractual provisions, it is quite clear that 40 per cent of this debt is nothing more than interest growing on a yearly basis. That debt naturally hampers our country and its economic capabilities. In addition, the Sudan is not able to benefit from international financial support initiatives.

I would also like to state here that the agreement on the zero option for foreign debt, which we signed after South Sudan split from the Republic of the Sudan, terminated in 2014. The agreement was renewed for two years, but it is coming to an end this month, without the international commitments on our debts having been met since 2005. No progress has been made in terms of writing off those debts, even though my country was eligible for it.

The Sudan condemns the phenomenon of terrorism, which is why we have to deploy all our efforts and coordinate with other countries to contain the phenomenon. What do we need to do? We need to tackle the roots of the problem by finding just solutions for the international problems that fuel terrorism: exclusion, marginalization and the failure to uphold the rights of people who have been deprived of them. To that end, we have hosted a number of workshops, seminars and forums, the most recent of which was entitled "The Role of the Arab Media in Countering Terrorism". At that forum, held in Khartoum in August, the Khartoum Declaration was adopted. It reaffirms the importance of combating terrorism, the central role of religious discourse, and the need to ensure that educational curriculums focuses on tolerance and acceptance of the other. The media need to be used in the right way to fight this scourge.

Unfortunately, the future of our planet hinges on the fight against such phenomena as the trafficking in human beings, drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime. These phenomena will be eradicated only if we pool the efforts of the international community and if the States of the world cooperate to stop these evils.

Because of the geographical situation of the Sudan, some have tried to take advantage of my country by making it a platform for trafficking in human beings and drug trafficking. With the help of the international community, we are doing everything we can to fight this exploitation, particularly by strengthening our law-enforcement capabilities and drafting the necessary legislation to improve communication and coordination. Thanks be to God, we have made significant progress in this area despite the lack of resources.

Israel continues to reject all initiatives aimed at achieving the two-State solution, which is why we have to do everything we can to terminate the last colonial regime in the world. We have to work to implement the two-State solution and create a sovereign Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We attach the greatest importance to the safety, security and stability of South Sudan, for we have historical blood ties with that country. Together with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and with our partners on the African continent and in the international community we will spare no effort to back our brothers in South Sudan and ensure that peace and security prevail in that country.

With an eye to calming all other hotbeds of tension around the world, we call for a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria. We must move away from any solution that involves force. We must preserve the territorial integrity of Syria. With respect to Yemen, we reaffirm our support to the Government of President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour. With respect to Libya, we reaffirm our support for the Government of President Faiez Mustafa Serraj and will spare no effort to preserve the territorial integrity, security and stability of the country and protect its resources.

I also wish to reaffirm the basic principle of our foreign policy, which is non-interference in the affairs of others. We reaffirm our support for the stability of South Sudan and the Central African Republic. We call upon the international community to spare no effort and to leave no stone unturned in helping these countries overcome the difficulties they are facing. The Sudan calls for dialogue and the renunciation of the use of force when it comes to managing and settling conflicts around the world.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Prak Sokhonn, Senior Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Mr. Sokhonn (Cambodia) (*spoke in French*): I should like to cordially congratulate His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson of the Republic of Fiji on his election as President of the Assembly at its seventy-first session. With a representative from a country that is famous

for the quality of its rugby leading our work, we can be assured that our work will be masterfully refereed. I wish to join those who have already expressed our collective gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, who in his capacity as Secretary-General has spared no effort to preserve peace where it is threatened and to restore it where violence is raging. The limitations that he encountered during his tenure were not his own, but those of a United Nations in need of reform.

The general debate provides us with an opportunity to take stock of humankind and our planet. Each and every one of us must make an effort to express the concerns and expectations of our peoples. We are the voices of the world. To say that the world is doing well, however, would not be credible. It must be noted that the outstanding progress made in science and technology has not been used to serve peace or the well-being of humankind.

There is a word that summarizes the tragedy of our world: violence. I speak here of wartime violence, terrorist violence, violence towards civilians and, tragically, towards children, violence towards other living species that are disappearing in large numbers, and violence towards the planet, which is suffering from a degree of turmoil that is threatening the survival of humankind itself, such as we know it today.

How is it that in the twenty-first century we are still facing these kinds of challenges? It is not enough to simply observe what is already clearly evident. We must understand these problems and respond to them. Our generation and, above all, future generations deserve a better world. Time restraints require that I focus on just a few topics.

I would first of all like to address collective security. The world is reeling from an outbreak of conflicts ravaging the Near and Middle East, but in other regions of the world as well. It is no less anxious about new tensions in other strategic regions of the planet, as the abuse of the right to intervene has catastrophic consequences that destabilize s States and entire regions. We observe the opening up of new global divisions characterized by policies of containment, which causes States to mobilize military means and results in new alliances that exclude certain other States.

The world became unipolar in 1991 and has since moved towards greater multipolarity, which has naturally generated strong resistance and troubling types of behaviour. Should countries large in size, population or economic power be absent from the Security Council? It is clear that the system of collective security that was implemented in 1945, and which was adapted to the bipolar world left in the wake of the Cold War, is now in great distress.

A small country such as my own too often feels pressure to choose sides and tries to reach understandings with other countries in order to give a voice to those who are scarcely listened to and who are always the first to suffer from geopolitical decisions. We have travelled that road before and have been subjected to a proxy war. Moreover, we cannot simply articulate the anguish of new escalating dangers. Together with all countries that are willing, we want to work to strike a new global balance that respects the realities of the twenty-first century. When tensions do emerge, we believe that our role is not to become embroiled in them but to enter into dialogue and do everything we can to contribute to the peaceful solution of disputes.

Current events force me to address the issue of terrorism and, more specifically, its root causes. Is such fanaticism not just the violent expression of anger? Such anger must be analysed. There are too many injustices and inequalities in our world. More importantly, there is an overly systematic two-tier system when it comes to decision-making. International law is imposed on some while others are exempted. With regard to religion, each Government must ensure, as we have successfully done in Cambodia, that members of all faiths can peacefully and respectfully live together in tolerance.

How can we overlook the tragedy of the Palestinian people, whose rights have been violated for 70 years? This tragedy has fed the revolt in the Arab world and hatred among the most indignant. An entire population's rights have been denied for decades. When faced with such a fact, how can we not understand that discourse on universal values and international law is no longer credible?

We hold no illusions: terrorism will be eradicated only when the principal reasons for becoming a terrorist no longer exist.

I would like to make a short comment on the economy. We now have sufficient experience in that area to evaluate the globalization born from World Trade Organization agreements and subsequent free trade agreements. Such experience has allowed us to make progress through the liberalization of markets.

but it has also shown us that real dangers emerge when corporations are given rights that allow them to conduct their business in any way they see fit. Continuous blackmail in favour of offshoring is a major obstacle to a country like mine, where we are working to improve working conditions and the standard of living, which remains low.

I wish to share in the collective satisfaction following the agreement last December at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We also welcome the fact that the two principal contributors to global warming have confirmed their involvement and determination. Sometimes deception is employed when it comes to respecting treaties, but it is an undeniable truth that we cannot deceive our planet. If the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties does not lead to concrete actions taken by all parties, there will be terrible and unstoppable consequences, leading to a series of destructive phenomena that will create new levels of suffering.

I now turn to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development embodies a series of very ambitious objectives. Such ambitions need to be matched, however, with a corresponding level of true political will. In that regard, I would like to highlight the responsibility of wealthy countries, which have the necessary resources to make the Goals a reality. Although the world has indeed made great progress in terms of human development since 1990, we should pay particular attention to two facts provided by the United Nations Development Programme: there are more than 2 billion people living in poverty in the world and 1.2 billion people living on less than $1.25 per day. If we take into consideration those two figures alone, the 17 SDGs become even more urgent.

I would like to conclude by speaking about my country, Cambodia. International institutions, Western parliamentarians and some Western non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have pointed the finger and tried to lay blame. However, I do not come before the Assembly as an accused party. I am addressing those present on behalf of a country that is often judged negatively, and even more often unrecognized and misunderstood, especially by the Western world. I come here with confidence. Many of us here refuse to see the international community conflated with the Western community and its opinions.

I am a survivor of the atrocities of Pol Pot and of a country that was turned into an immense forced labour camp. After United States Air Force bombers completely destroyed us, our country endured the extreme suffering brought on by one of the cruelest regimes of the twentieth century. I must therefore recall that in the wake of such affliction in Cambodia in 1979, Viet Nam was the only member of the international community to respond to the call of those fleeing the genocidal regime. Our population of 8 million inhabitants in 1970 had been reduced to some 4.5 million by 1979. The State, central and local Governments, hospitals, schools, our currency and religion had all ceased to exist. The roads were damaged and infrastructure and institutions had disappeared. In 1979, all that remained in Cambodia were 8 of our 750 lawyers, 45 of our 450 doctors and 7,000 of our 22,000 teachers. A total of 54 per cent of all medical personnel were gone, and of our 1,600 agricultural technicians, only 200 were still alive.

In 1979, the survivors were in extremely debilitated physical and mental states. Nevertheless, they were still punished for having been freed by a country that had done nothing to please the coalition that for over 11 years caused total destruction in the country, traumatized the survivors and imposed a crippling embargo that prohibited all development aid. We had nothing and we were deprived of everything. Given that, Members of the Assembly might wonder why would I want to bring up the past. I do so because it is a past that is not yet in the past. How do we not understand that the past continues to deeply affect the present? How do we not understand that the past continues to weigh upon us today in terms of human resources?

In the West, some NGOs, media and Governments describe even our slightest shortcomings as crimes of the State. With the Paris accords, we were obliged to accept a perfect model of democracy that took no account of the specificities of our country or the human resources required to implement it. We are now being criticized for disregarding the rights of the opposition. At the same time, however, the western NGOs and Governments that support the political opposition claim that we are violating our laws and not punishing crimes that undermine our national security, such as defamation, calumny, incitement to racial hatred and the production of fake treaties and identification cards. Meanwhile, it is the opposition that is committing these crimes.

We have made considerable progress in education, health care and infrastructure. Similarly, we have successfully fought AIDS and malaria. We have undertaken a long and difficult fight against corruption. Our Ministries of the Environment and Agriculture are striving to correct the mistakes that have been made with respect to forestry licenses. The poverty rate has dropped every year by 1 per cent and we have experienced an average growth rate of more than 7 per cent since 1994.

In Cambodia, we are addressing an issues that can truly hinder sustainable development — mines and explosive remnants of war. We have made the eradication of these deadly devices an eighteenth Sustainable Development Goal in Cambodia, similar to what we did with the Millennium Development Goals. Our country, which has gained has considerable and painful experience in demining, has been participating in peacekeeping operations by sending demining contingents since 2006. Currently, more than 900 women and men of these contingents, as well as engineers, doctors and military police, are working in Lebanon, Mali, the Central African Republic, the Sudan and South Sudan.

Regarding climate change, I am pleased to announce that just yesterday we completed the procedure of ratifying the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

We have known the extreme horrors of war. More than others, we understand the price of peace, and we prioritize peaceful conflict resolution in all circumstances, sometimes at the risk of being misunderstood. Lastly, our exceptionally difficult past has made us part and parcel of the network of States that are committed to preventing mass crimes. To that end, and with regard to the responsibility to protect (R2P), we have designated the individual who will be our national correspondent to the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, proposed by the United Nations.

Based on this assessment, does our country deserve to be subjected to Western obloquy? We will let those present be the judges.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Maxime Pamela Ometa McClean, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados.

Ms. McClean (Barbados): I am pleased today to congratulate Mr. Thomson on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. The Government of Barbados is pleased that Fiji, a fellow small island developing State (SIDS), has been elevated to such an important office. Forty-six years ago, the Prime Minister of Barbados, The Honourable Errol Walton Barrow, in his address to this body, congratulated Fiji on its attainment of independence (see A/PV.1866). He pointed out that Barbados was especially pleased to have been one of the sponsors of resolution 2622 (XXV), admitting Fiji to the United Nations. I assure the President of the full support and cooperation of the Barbados delegation as he discharges his duties.

I extend sincere thanks to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for his steady guidance of the work of the General Assembly during its seventieth session.

I also take this opportunity to recognize the contribution of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, whose tenure is drawing to an end. Secretary-General Ban has been a dedicated and committed leader of the Organization. He has been a friend of SIDS, including Barbados. The Government of Barbados extends sincere appreciation for his dedicated global service during a turbulent but productive period.

The seventy-first session is of deep significance to Barbados. It coincides with the celebration this year of two historic anniversaries. On 30 November, we celebrate our fiftieth anniversary of independence and nationhood, followed closely by our fiftieth anniversary of membership in the United Nations.

One of the cornerstones on which the foreign policy of Barbados is built is our unwavering commitment to the United Nations. We see the United Nations as the core of an effective multilateral system, with responsibility for addressing issues of international peace, security and development. Today, 50 years on, Barbados stands more firmly committed to the principle of multilateralism. For the United Nations to deliver on our expectations, its organizational structure must reflect the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century. We therefore support efforts to reform the Security Council and to revitalize the General Assembly.

The theme of this year's General Assembly is "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world". We must act now to make the vision of 2030 a reality. Barbados believes that partnership and collaboration will be the keys to fulfilling the promise

of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That is especially true for SIDS.

The Prime Minister of Barbados, Mr. Freundel Stuart, addressed this theme in his statement to the Alliance of Small Island States Leaders' Conference, held in the margins of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in September 2014. Prime Minister Stuart highlighted the importance of United Nations support for the implementation of the SIDS Agenda. We therefore welcome the progress made by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in its comprehensive review of the United Nations system's support for SIDS, and we look forward to tangible improvements as a result of its work.

Last week, I was pleased to participate in the launch, in Barbados, of the *Caribbean Human Development Report 2016*. The theme of the report is "Multidimensional progress: human resilience beyond income". It highlights the unique situation of the small island developing States and low-lying coastal States in the Caribbean. Three central issues stand out: vulnerability, resilience and sustainability. Barbados welcomes the report. It validates the consistent call by the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and of SIDS in general, for SIDS to be recognized as a special case for sustainable development.

The Government of Barbados is devising and implementing effective strategies to strengthen social, economic and environmental resilience that is consistent with our national growth and development philosophy. It is based on supporting a Barbados that is socially balanced, economically viable, environmentally sound, and characterized by good governance — our four strategic pillars. We are therefore pleased that Barbados is already pursuing the ideals enshrined in Agenda 2030.

The existential threat which climate change poses to small island developing States like Barbados is well documented. We are a leading advocate for coordinated action at the international level to address the sources and consequences of our vulnerability. The Prime Minister of Barbados was one of the leaders who participated in the formal signing ceremony of the landmark Paris Agreement on Climate Change in April. He deposited the instrument of ratification on the same occasion. We look forward to its early entry into force. At the national level, Barbados has developed a national climate change policy framework that works seamlessly with the Barbados sustainable development policy to address issues of climate adaptation and mitigation.

Barbados exercises jurisdiction over maritime space that far exceeds its very limited land territory. We therefore recognize the vast potential of the ocean and its sustainable exploitation as an important component of our future development. We are also developing a comprehensive national ocean governance strategyto address the sustainable management of our maritime space and the sustainable use of Barbados' marine living and non-living resources.

As we seek to protect and preserve our oceans and seas for future generations, Barbados will continue to participate actively in the various oceans-related processes of the United Nations. During the current session, my delegation will collaborate with other members of the Association of Caribbean States to strengthen the level of support for the Caribbean Sea resolution. Our ultimate aim is the designation of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development. We count on your support.

Barbadians are a proud and industrious people. With minimal natural resources and the constraints of small size and vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters, our people have achieved a significant level of human development in 50 years of independence. We have done so by dint of hard work, sacrifice and faith. We remain resolute in our determination to overcome the many obstacles we face: the unilateral and unidimensional graduation policies of international development agencies that penalize us for progress in human development, while ignoring our obvious vulnerabilities; the negative impact of the economic and financial decisions of international financial and other institutions, illustrated by the consequences of de-risking on correspondent banking activity; and the persistent and unwarranted attacks on our international financial services sector, accompanied by the imposition of onerous conditionalities. Those actions threaten our economic stability and our ability to participate in global financial, trade and economic systems. They undermine our capacity to achieve the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. We call for dialogue with development partners and greater policy space and policy flexibility for SIDS.

The United Nations was born of the post-war desire of nations for international peace and security,

Barbados is a firm proponent of the rule of law at the national, regional and international levels. We reiterate our commitment to maintaining the Caribbean as a zone of peace. In that context, Barbados reaffirms its unwavering support for the territorial integrity of fellow CARICOM States Belize and Guyana. We call for definitive solutions to their long-standing disputes with neighbouring States Guatemala and Venezuela. Barbados welcomes the recent steady progress towards the normalization of bilateral relations between Cuba and the United States of America. We look forward to the dismantling of the final vestiges of that long-standing embargo.

On that memorable evening on 30 November 1966, as the national flag of Barbados was unfurled for the first time, there was a sense of exultation, expectation and pride. Our first Prime Minister stated in his first address to the General Assembly:

> "Humility must be the most appropriate feeling for the leader of a State admitted to membership of this illustrious Assembly on the basis of sovereign equality." (*A/PV.1487, para. 72*)

Half a century later, we believe that both independence and membership in the United Nations have served us well and afforded us the opportunity to pursue the goals which have informed the progress that we have achieved. Looking forward, we are committed to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We expect it to guarantee further development of the Barbadian economy and society and to serve as our contribution to the universal push to transform our world.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation of the Republic of Burundi.

Mr. Nyamitwe (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank our Lord, who has watched over us on our journey and enabled us to be here for this important meeting of the United Nations.

On behalf of Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi, and of the entire Burundian people, I would like to congratulate Mr. Peter Thomson, a worthy son of Fiji, on his election on 13 June to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. He will always be able to count on Burundi's full cooperation during his tenure. I also commend Mr. Mogens Lykketoft for his excellent work in presiding with brio over the seventieth session, which he brought to a delightful close on 13 September.

I would also like to reiterate our confidence in Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Burundi will cooperate fully with him during the remainder of his term and wishes him health, happiness and every success in his future work. We would also like to convey our best wishes to the new Secretary-General, who will be starting at a very important moment for the world.

(*spoke in English*)

Regarding the inter-Burundian dialogue, the Government of Burundi has participated in every meeting held at the invitation of the facilitator of the East African Community (EAC). I would like to inform the Assembly that on 8 September, the facilitator, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, presented his report to the EAC summit, calling for a renewed commitment on the part of all stakeholders to engaging in the EAC-led dialogue. The Government of the Republic of Burundi is of the view that the dialogue should not replace or undermine the democratic tenets of the country's Constitution, while it reaffirms its commitment to the dialogue, as expressed at the last EAC summit.

We believe that peaceful political stakeholders, in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolutions 2248 (2015) and 2279 (2016), are welcome to discuss the future of Burundi. By the same token, and with a view to opening up to greater inclusivity, our national commission for inter-Burundian dialogue has submitted its report on six months of discussions with Burundians from all walks of life, from grassroots communities to the upper echelons of society. Our citizens have called for a number of major reforms for improving Burundi's stability that cannot be ignored, and the Government has taken note of them.

I stand before the Assembly today to reiterate Burundi's unwavering commitment to human rights. A well-regarded national commission and fully fledged ministerial department are in charge of human rights, and we should support them. The Government wishes to reaffirm its commitment to ensuring the security of all our citizens, regardless of their ethnic origin. None of the three ethnic groups is above the others, nor is any group a pariah. As established in our Constitution, all our citizens have equal opportunities.

Currently in Burundi, we are working to consolidate security gains in the face of numerous actors with only one goal — regime change — and whose methods are uniformly violent. It is crucial to ensure great caution in assessing the situation. The fact is that rumors, false information and social media, have all been used to portray Burundi in a bad light. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to categorically reject the deliberattely politically exaggerated reports of alleged human rights violations in Burundi. Some cases have been taken out of context and others blown out of proportion, with no mention of the security personnel who have been killed while on duty. The report I refer to (A/HRC/32/30) is marred by its controversial selection of victims, while the method of collecting testimony through WhatsApp messages is a departure from United Nations practices. Our Government will take the opportunity to present a comprehensive counter-report in Geneva in the next few days.

On the other hand, Burundi would like to reiterate its openness to the African Union's human rights monitors and military experts. The financial and structural challenges that the African Union Commission is dealing with, which have stalled the generation of the necessary personnel, are not our fault. Regarding the memorandum of understanding between Burundi and the Commission, my Government calls on the Commission to uphold fully and in good faith the terms of the agreement reached in Bujumbura during the meeting in February of the six African Union Heads of State and Government.

Regarding Security Council resolution 2303 (2016), adopted under Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations, Burundi was shocked by the lack of consensus and the surprise manner in which it was adopted. While the consultations before the adoption did not result in full approval of the penholder's proposal, some Council members thought that Burundi's consent should be obtained before creating a fait accompli. Resolutions under Chapter VI of the Charter are predicated on the consent of the Government concerned.

Where the humanitarian situation is concerned, our Government has made the return of refugees a priority. We are aware of the extremely difficult conditions they are living in, mostly in neighbouring countries, and we will spare no effort to enable every one of them to return home. We have guaranteed the security of their goods and property, and around 90,000 refugees have voluntarily returned home over the past four months. I would like to urge all our neighbours to help to facilitate their voluntary repatriation. The Government of the Republic of Burundi is in discussions with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on launching tripartite negotiations with the host countries.

Also in line with the relevant provisions of resolutions 2248 (2015) and 2279 (2016), and in order to comply with the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, the Government of the Republic of Burundi calls on all its neighbours to refrain from aiding and abetting the violent schemes of some groups, especially those that failed in their bid on 13 May 2015 to overthrow Burundi's democratic institutions and attacked us on 10 July 2015. The report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2016/466), submitted to the Security Council a few months ago, is comprehensive and clear on the activities of those groups, which have attacked Burundi more than once, and my Government urges the Council to act on those findings.

Regarding United Nations reform, Africa, along with other regions of the world, has called for reform of our Organization's bodies, particularly the Security Council, again and again. Decision 62/557 paved the way for instituting negotiations on reform. As countless delegations have pointed out, it is absolutely unacceptable that, more than seven decades after its creation, our Organization is still functioning with the same post-war mindset, with a few Members claiming more rights than the rest. The Government of the Republic of Burundi fully supports the African Union position outlined in the Ezulwini Consensus.

Our Organization needs a new impetus. However, there are some steps that can be taken even before that goal is reached. For instance, the three African non-permanent members of the Council should be given more responsibilities and allowed to work independently. If more than 70 per cent of the situations under consideration by the Council originate in Africa, it is not too much to ask that the so-called penholders be African countries, especially in light of the sometimes biased views of Africa entertained by some Council members.

The shock and horror of the images we have seen of migrants seeking refuge in Europe are a constant reminder to all of us that while the world we live in

may be one of shared opportunities it is also one of shared challenges. While we call on countries of destination to demonstrate more humanity in catering to migrants, we believe it is important to analyse the deep-rooted causes of such mass exoduses of the young men, women and children who find it necessary to risk their lives on the open sea in search of better opportunities. One way of reducing the problem is by supporting well-intentioned development programmes undertaken by the countries of the South. As their social and economic situation improves, more people will find reasons to stay in their own countries, but that can happen only if we all understand that we must respect the political, social, economic and cultural fabric of every country. Unfortunately, that is not always the case today.

This year's general debate is taking place at a time when terrorism is affecting the entire world and has hit every region. Some progress has been made, but we have to recognize the fact that efforts to develop a common strategy have not yet yielded the hoped-for results. Terrorist attacks have shaken countries in every corner of the world and touched all of us. My country is concerned about the surge in such attacks, and my Government, as always, condemns terrorism in all its manifestations and sympathizes with its victims. We believe that we must wage the fight against terrorism with greater determination.

Matching its words with deeds, Burundi has been sending troops to fight terrorism and violent extremism in many parts of the world since 2007. More than 5,000 Burundian troops are in Somalia fighting Al-Shabaab as part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Our continued presence there is proof of Burundi's firm commitment to combating terrorism, in full solidarity with our brothers and sisters on the continent and beyond. We believe that the fight against terrorism anywhere is a contribution to global peace.

Despite the fact that two formed police units from Burundi were not rotated into the Central African Republic for politically motivated reasons, we remain committed to peace and security, and our men and women in uniform are still prepared to serve in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic with the same zeal that has been shown by our police units in Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti and Darfur. Our only interest is in helping our brothers and sisters to recover their dignity and freedom. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the partners that have continued to support such missions. As a troop-contributing country, Burundi urges the United Nations to fill the gap left by the cuts in the European Union's budget for AMISOM.

Burundi has also participated in other initiatives, such as the European Union action plan on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear security, aimed at preventing terrorist groups and non-State actors from acquiring substances that could be used for terrorist purposes. However, none of those initiatives can help us defeat terrorism if structural causes such as inequality and poverty are not dealt with. People need to be able to put bread on the table.

My delegation would like to note here how essential it is that all Member States incorporate the 17 Sustainable Development Goals into the design of their policies, programmes and budgets. For its part, Burundi is committed to putting its citizens at the centre of its development policies. With its partners' valuable support, the Government of Burundi is working to respond to the needs of its most vulnerable citizens as inclusively as possible. We are working together with every country on the planet to promote and implement a sustainable, durable regime on climate, as well as a legally binding instrument, and we must make sure we consolidate the gains achieved on that epoch-making day of 21 December 2015. In a few months, Burundi will join those countries that have already ratified the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

On 13 October 1961 in Bujumbura, our then Prime Minister, His Royal Highness Louis Rwagasore, the hero of our independence, was assassinated by elements close to the colonial administration as he presided over his first and last cabinet meeting. On 15 January 1965, Pierre Ngendandumwe, our Prime Minister, was gunned down in Bujumbura by a local embassy staffer. On 21 October 1993, Melchior Ndadaye, the first democratically elected President of Burundi, was assassinated by army troops from one ethnic group. On 13 May 2015, a bid to overthrow Burundi's legitimate institutions failed. What all those sad events have in common, however, is the unhealthy and obvious involvement of foreign elements. And we should not forget that President Ntaryamira died in a foreign land when the plane carrying him and the then-President of Rwanda was shot down on 6 April 1994.

In that regard, it is important to remember that African societies are highly complex. What Burundi is

asking for is to be seen fairly, on its own terms, not through the lenses of other situations in other countries. We do not welcome any kind of foreign interference in our affairs, because Burundi has been flying the flag of a sovereign State since 1 July 1962, however difficult that may be for some to understand.

Three communities live in our beautiful land, bordered on the west by majestic Lake Tanganyika, the world's second deepest, and by two other countries to the north and east. The Hutu, Tutsi and Twa peoples live in harmony in Burundi and have an equal say in the affairs of Government, as provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of Burundi. No group is above or below another.

It is crucial to take into account the suffering and pain that our people endured as a result of bad leadership in the past. The wounds left by the massacres of the past remind us to treat all our citizens the same way, with no distinctions between classes or groups. Victims know no majority or minority — their pain is the same. We therefore refuse to manipulate or falsify history. Our citizens continue to mourn their loved ones, lost to ignorance and the barbaric practices of the military regimes that overthrew the monarchy and proclaimed a republic. For more than 40 years, the various Burundi Administrations in Burundi busied themselves segregating and killing citizens on the basis of their ethnicity.

The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of 2000 and our 2005 Constitution defined the place of all citizens in the country's administration, in what was seen to be an equitable way of ensuring peace and stability. Those tenets are still in place today, and the Arusha Agreement is fully respected in our institutions. Similarly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission envisaged in the Arusha Agreement has now been established. We therefore call on the United Nations to support the Commission's work. The Barundi people now have a forum that can address the sad events in their history. They need to know why their nation changed from being one in which different ethnic communities lived in harmony to one in which citizens lost their lives because of their ethnic origins. The process will enable us to tap into the knowledge resources of the United Nations, which entrusted the administration of Burundi to a third country.

Lastly, our people — the Hutu, the Tutsi and the Twa — want only to live in peace and harmony. They unanimously reject genocidal rhetoric. They form one single society, one nation. They share a faith in their common future, which they want to be peaceful and prosperous, one of equal opportunity. As President Pierre Nkurunziza has said time and again, there will be no genocide in the Republic of Burundi. That is our faith and the faith of all our people. And we, the people of Burundi, will fight that evil with every possible means.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdusalam Hadliyeh Omer, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Investment Promotion of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

Mr. Omer (Somalia): On behalf of my Government and my people, it is an honour and a privilege for me to address the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. I bring warm greetings and good wishes from our President, His Excellency Mr. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, and our Prime Minister, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, our entire Government and the people of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session, for his excellent leadership. I wish him well in all his duties.

I also pay a special tribute to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who has truly championed development across the world in all its forms. In his two terms as Secretary-General we have seen a smooth transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals and the encouragement of greater, more innovative cross-sectoral partnerships for achieving progress for all. Whoever succeeds him as Secretary-General certainly has big shoes to fill.

The United Nations is indeed the foremost platform for nations of the world to come together as a community of nations to discuss and tackle the greatest challenges of our time. Those challenges are clear and require robust and coordinated international action to overcome. No one nation, no matter how powerful or resourceful, can alone address the grave challenges posed by climate change, terrorism, poverty and the large movements of refugees and migrants, as well as conflict. More important, no one nation today can claim that many of those great challenges are "not in my backyard; therefore, I do not need to act". In an age of globalization, interconnectivity and interdependence

there is a duty incumbent upon us all to work even more closely together to protect and to advance the common interests of all humankind.

The Government of Somalia is truly committed to the Charter of the United Nations and the values of justice, peace and progress for all. Furthermore, our Government is immersed in laying the groundwork for the successful implementation of the crucial 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a focus on peace and security, good governance and economic and social development through innovative partnerships at home. We are determined, in the interest of our mutual national and regional development and progress, to ensure that no one is left behind. Leaving people behind, especially the most vulnerable in our societies, would lead to incomplete progress and signify division and a lack of social solidarity among our peoples and within our nations.

Somalia is a country that I dearly love, represent and serve. I am proud to say that all our partners, allies and friends across the world have recognized both the potential and the strategic value of our country for international security, trade and the promotion of democracy and good governance internationally. More important, during this week's high-level meeting on Somalia, held on the margins of the General Assembly meetings, the Government of the Federal Republic of Somalia and our key international partners exchanged views on the current progress and the remaining challenges in our country. I am glad to report that our partners have both recognized and pledged to continue supporting Somalia's fruitful journey towards democratization, stability and sustainable development.

Somalia is taking bold and unprecedented steps towards a better future. That historic move towards progress and empowerment is driven by our resilient people, our determined central Government and all our valuable international partners. After nearly two decades of difficulties and instability, Somalia has negotiated a permanent turn towards progress and prosperity. We are writing a new chapter in our history, one that is characterized by hope, inclusive governance and development.

I am proud to say that our Government, in cooperation with our people and valuable partners, has made tangible progress on the key issues of elections, the configuration of the State, security and economic development. Despite our fruitful cooperation with, and gratitude to, our international partners and friends, the Somali Government and the people take full responsibility for their own future in every way. Therefore, the Somali Government and the people — the ultimate stakeholders and beneficiaries of progress in the country — are stepping up to the many challenges so as to ensure that our country and people fulfil their potential and that of their beautiful and rich home.

Somalia is winning the war against international terrorism at home and contributing to the creation of a safer world through cooperation on security with international partners across the world. With the support of our brave Somali national security services and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), we have militarily defeated the evil that is Al-Shabaab. Defeating international terrorism is a fundamental priority for Somalia, as those murderous criminals pose a genuine threat to us all and our way of life. The threat of terrorism is indeed international, as no country, regardless of its abilities, can insulate itself from that threat, given the new technologies and the fluidity of borders. Terrorism is truly a pointless evil without geography and without respect for the sanctity of human life. We can and must defeat it through partnerships across all international sectors. During the past four years, the Somali National Army and AMISOM have regained key towns and cities across Somalia. Today Al-Shabaab controls less than 10 per cent of the territory of the country. In recent months many of their key leaders have been eliminated. Others have defected, and their violent ideology is truly shunned by the Somali people. Somali national forces and AMISOM have proven that Al-Shabaab is vulnerable and divided, and can be defeated through coordinated military action.

As a result of the success of the joint operations of the Somali National Army and AMISOM, Al-Shabaab has turned to small-team, asymmetric warfare tactics in order to conduct terrorist attacks against soft targets in Somalia and, increasingly, in neighbouring countries. In response, our Government is working with our partners and neighbours to enhance security cooperation so as to enable us to respond to the threat, together and swiftly. Whereas before 2012 Al-Shabaab was engaged in open warfare with the Somali armed forces and AMISOM, today they are limited to undertaking infrequent, desperate and opportunistic suicide attacks on mosques, hotels, restaurants and businesses, as well as carrying out the assassination of innocent citizens.

That is the best evidence of their moral bankruptcy, ideological falsehood and diminished capabilities.

The Federal Republic of Somalia and our people are grateful to the troop-contributing countries in AMISOM for their support in stabilizing our country. We thank the brotherly States of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Nigeria for contributing to the AMISOM forces and the police contingent. We fully recognize the sacrifices that their service personnel have made, and continue to make, in the service of Somalia and its people's future. I can assure the Assembly that their valour and distinguished service will never be forgotten. In fact, it is and will always be honoured in our national development.

While we are grateful to AMISOM and our international partners for their diverse security-sector assistance, we fully understand that the only way we can truly achieve long-term stability and development, both in Somalia and across the region, is to have well-trained, equipped and funded Somali national security forces, which we hope to achieve ahead of the agreed deadline under which AMISOM will draw down in 2018. From all of that, it should be clear that the Somali Government and the people are committed to, and are leading the creation of, a safer Somalia, region and world.

On the matter of countering violent extremism, effectively countering the poisonous ideologies of hate that radicalize vulnerable young people is crucial in order to achieve permanent peace in Somalia and across the world. On 12 September His Excellency Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, President of Somalia, officially launched the national strategy and action plan for preventing and countering violent extremism for Somalia. Somalia is pleased that that inclusive process, which began more than 10 months ago, has successfully concluded with a comprehensive national strategy and action plan for preventing and countering violent extremism. The document is the result of a rigorous and inclusive process of dialogue and discussion with all the key stakeholders that lasted up to the point of its adoption by the Somali Government. The national strategy and action plan for preventing and countering violent extremism provides a holistic framework for addressing domestic and international security threats, including terrorism. With the completion of that vital strategy, Somalia has now fulfilled the call of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for each Member State to develop an action plan and strategy for preventing violent extremism.

The Federal Government of Somalia, in consultation with the federal states — which were all formed democratically starting in 2012, with one currently undergoing the process — has adopted a credible, transparent and inclusive electoral mechanism that we hope will pave the way for universal suffrage by 2020. The Somali people are excited by that positive move towards democracy, and the various electoral commissions, as well as the Somali people in general, are working tirelessly on the implementation of the electoral mechanism in line with the agreed time line.

As I speak, many aspiring parliamentarians are returning to their constituencies to win over voters so that they can represent them in the next Parliament. Billboards depicting presidential hopefuls seeking to win the hearts and minds of the Somali people line the roads and streets ahead of the election. That is a truly historic leap forward in terms of democratization in Somalia and provides clear evidence of the spirit and values of democracy taking shape in the country. The Federal Government of Somalia is determined to ensure a smooth, peaceful, inclusive and enhanced electoral process for a peaceful democratic transition in November.

We are also championing a 30 per cent quota for women in Parliament, as their representation and political participation is central to our national progress. Those actions most certainly constitute the first step towards the implementation of the 2020 political road map for universal suffrage in Somalia and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In Somalia we are not short of ambition or self-confidence. We are committed to achieving our State-building goals with equity and good governance as a crucial baseline. We are also determined to leave no one behind in our march forward towards a better tomorrow.

I am sure that everyone appreciates the difficulties of transitioning from conflict to inclusive governance and development. The Somali people and the Government are endeavouring to accomplish in just four years the kind of national transformation that took decades or centuries for many countries. Despite the enormity of the tasks ahead, we are committed and determined to succeed in achieving progress and prosperity for our people, the region and the world in general.

Turning to economic development, the Federal Republic of Somalia fully acknowledges that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, to which we committed last year at the General Assembly, is central to our overall progress. Realistically achieving at least some of the Goals quickly and effectively, with a view to achieving the rest over the longer term, will ensure the success of our overall national and regional agenda for peace, sustainable development and prosperity. To that end, we have developed an inclusive, people-centred and implementable national development plan, which will act as a blueprint for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals within the set time frame.

Throughout the United Nations, many key discussions have focused on funding development priorities across the world, especially the Sustainable Development Goals. In Somalia we fully understand and appreciate that the traditional aid model alone cannot ensure development and that it must be complemented by national contributions. In that spirit, and with the attainment of progress and prosperity for our people and region as a key driver, we have made investment promotion a central focus of Somali foreign and economic policy.

Somalia is truly a rich nation, with the longest coast in Africa. Seventy per cent of its population is under 30 years of age. Our Government has passed one of the most competitive investment laws in the world, and we are ready to welcome and directly support all investors in each and every sector. In green energy, agriculture, infrastructure, telecommunications and the blue economy, Somalia can become a world leader and a profitable home for investors and new enterprises, with easy access to the African, Middle Eastern and Far Eastern markets. When the goal of investment is realized, most of the issues that we face in connection with illegal migration, large movements of refugees and poverty will be overcome in Somalia.

Relying on partnerships and the great efforts of all, especially the Somali people themselves, Somalia has turned the corner toward stability and progress. Today shops are open, schools are full and our markets are busy with traders and customers. More important, our diaspora is returning to invest and build our key institutions, and we thank those Governments and organizations that have encouraged and continue to actively encourage such activities. In the past year alone, Somalia achieved many milestones. We most recently hosted the historic Extraordinary Summit of Intergovernmental Authority on Development Heads of State and Government in Mogadishu. We also successfully undertook our first national secondary school exams since the civil war — with the highest score received by a bright young lady. We are positively contributing to the stability, progress and development of our region, continent and the world through partnerships.

Through diverse partnerships, we are also working on getting Somali refugees to return home from Kenya voluntarily and with dignity so that they can actively participate in the efforts to rebuild their nation. Somalia, more than any other nation today, recognizes the importance of peacebuilding, which will help to avert the international refugee crisis. We appreciate the valuable contribution that refugees make to their new and old homes through remittances and cultural education, which is crucial for promoting tolerance. We are determined to save vulnerable lives at sea and reverse the brain drain holding our national progress hostage by striving to create at home the very opportunities that our people seek abroad.

It is impossible to forget the difficult past, but it is absolutely possible and necessary to dedicate oneself and the nation to a better future. That is what we are going to do in Somalia. In that regard, hope, confidence and progress characterize the new Somalia and all its people. There is no turning back now; we can only go forward together and in partnership with the region and the rest of the world. As we take the significant and necessary steps to confront the biggest challenges of our time as a community of nations, such as terrorism, poverty and large movements of refugees and migrants, we can assure everyone that Somalia and its people will play their part in the solutions.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Asim, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives.

Mr. Asim (Maldives): I wish to begin by congratulating the President on his assumption of office. The Maldives is proud to welcome a distinguished diplomat from a fellow island State to preside over the General Assembly at its seventy-first session.

I also wish to congratulate Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for all of his hard work over the past 10 years, and especially for his efforts on climate-change advocacy and sustainable development and his partnership with

small island developing States (SIDS). He is certainly leaving a legacy of enormous historical significance.

Rarely do we get an opportunity to come together — the whole world — for a moment of collective agreement. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was such a moment. It is an Agenda of hope, a blueprint for advancing humankind, a plan for empowering the impoverished and a promise to future generations. The Agenda recognizes at its core that all efforts to achieve development should be holistic and that poverty is multidimensional. It recognizes that differentiated responses are necessary, even if aspirations are universal. It recognizes that development efforts should include everyone and address everyone.

President Abdullah Yameen Abdul Gayoom's development efforts aim to empower everyone so that all of society can share in the development dividends. We have reached our current situation through sustained, continuous, and targeted investment in health and education.

We find that the best way to sustain our developmental gains is to focus on our people. That is why we have made it our aim to deliver easily accessible health care to every citizen — a feat that is extremely challenging for a population of 338,000 people dispersed over 188 islands. It is why we have ensured free health care, provided sea ambulances on all 20 atolls and established a pharmacy on every inhabited island. It is why we have not stopped investing in education, despite achieving nearly 100 per cent literacy. Rather, we have continued to invest in teacher quality, while continuously improving and updating our curriculums and our approach. It is why we aim to provide affordable social housing, especially to all vulnerable groups of our society. In that connection, we aim to empower people with disabilities through financial and material support, such as the provision of housing for those with disabilities. That is also why we have chosen to focus on youth — improving their lives, their livelihood opportunities and their aspirations.

Investing in our people will put us on the right path. No investment has higher returns than investments in women and girls. Empowering women and girls to make their own choices and to determine the destiny of their choosing is not only the moral, responsible and correct choice to make; it is the smart decision to make. Women constitute half of our population. They can, and should, contribute to our economy; they can, and should, contribute to our society.

Women in the Maldives have had the right to vote since our first Constitution, in 1932. Women in the Maldives have always been in our offices, in our politics and in our society. They have always had equal pay and equal rights, which is now enshrined in our Constitution. Today a woman in the Maldives can also go to a court of law and use the newly adopted Gender Equality Act to claim those rights. They can challenge cases involving gender inequality, sexual harassment and sexual abuse with specifically defined laws to back them up. We still have a long way to go — every country does — but we believe that we are on the right track to making institutional and structural changes that will bring about lasting and sustainable normative change.

A much-celebrated feature of the 2030 Agenda is its universality. The Goals and targets apply to all nations; they have been adopted by everyone. Yet embedded in those common responsibilities is the reality of special circumstances. Maldives is a small island developing State — a status that we cannot graduate from. Our islands are uniquely susceptible to economic, environmental and institutional shocks because we are so dependent on the rest of the world. Measures of development that are used to rank countries continue to ignore that reality. Development status continues to be determined on the basis of gross domestic product per capita. That system disadvantages smaller countries with small populations. To escape the "island paradox," we need the international community to re-evaluate how development is assessed. There needs to be a concerted effort to integrate the economic vulnerability of countries into such assessments. Without such a re-evaluation, our approach to development will never be holistic.

The fact that we have graduated from least-developed-country status does not mean that we have overcome our challenges. Large-scale infrastructure — ports, airports, hospitals, harbours — is still required across the entire Maldives. Yet the large-scale financing needed for those projects is not readily available because the preferential and concessional arrangements for financing were lost after we graduated from least-developed-country status. Those limitations make it harder to maintain and sustain the development gains that enabled us to graduate in the first place.

The Maldives is one of the countries that is most vulnerable to environmental shocks and one of the most exposed to the impacts of climate change. Climate change is an existential threat to our country. It has the potential to erode decades of development gains. For decades, we have been advocating urgent action on climate change and asking the world to take notice. As a lone voice in a sea of sceptics, we were not necessarily heard. But today, together with the 43 members of the Alliance of Small Island States, we can can have a greater impact. With 13 other SIDS, we, the Maldives, were among the first ratifiers of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We know that our emissions are almost negligible. But we want the international community to know that, small though we may be, we are making the choice to take action, and to take action now. We want the international community to continue to invest in action to prevent climate change and in forging meaningful partnerships. Investing today is saving tomorrow.

While we continue to be alarmed by the realities of climate change, another crisis looms. That is the state of our oceans. As a large-ocean State, our major economic activities depend on the health and wealth of the oceans. We are concerned about them. As in many situations, the issue at hand is one that needs a collective response. One such opportunity is the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, on the sustainable use of the oceans, which is to be held in June 2017. It will provide an opportunity for the international community to come together with renewed hope to find solutions that can get the results we desire.

An overarching and cross-cutting theme across all the agendas is investment — investing in our people, investing in our economies and investing in our environment. Above all, investment in our institutions is of the utmost importance. In order to implement ambitious agendas, our institutions and governance structures need to be sufficient and capable of delivering the results we want. The Maldives has been arguing for some time now that, unless small States are able to build strong institutions, they will not be able to build resilience in the spheres of economy and climate change.

We began the process of democratization only a decade ago. Informed by events and based on lessons learned, our institutions are adapting and changing. Institutions need space to form on their own. They need to develop organically and to evolve with the needs and priorities of our society. While a healthy amount of scrutiny is necessary and welcome, institutions cannot build resilience under a constant microscope. However, the Maldives will remain engaged with the international community.

Today we have accepted that economic advancement goes hand in hand with social development and environmental protection. I hope that we have all accepted the fact that development needs to be holistic and that problems and solutions have interlinked consequences. The massive shift seen in provisions of the 2030 Agenda reflects precisely that reality, that all issues are interlinked.

It is in that vein that we have accepted that there can be no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development. And nowhere is that more apparent than in Palestine. Cycles of violence and hatred perpetuated by the occupying Power, Israel, have led nowhere. A two-State solution that offers peace, stability and security is the only solution. Guaranteeing Palestinians the right to self-determination and sovereignty over their own land and natural resources is the only way out of the conflict.

A military solution is never the answer. Look at the condition of Syria. Thousands of innocent children, men and women have lost their lives to the conflict. Hundreds more are fleeing for their lives, only to be turned away by the politics of fear. Fences and wires do not stop violence; compassion and tolerance do. The rising tide of hatred, Islamophobia and xenophobia in the name of security will lead only to more violence, as more people feel more marginalized and more people find more reasons for hatred. And radical elements of society find much to feed on in poverty, misery and victimization.

We live in a world marred by extreme acts carried out in the name of religion and extremist beliefs, which instil fear in others. That is our reality. The Maldives condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We reject radicalism. We especially denounce all acts of violence carried out in the name of Islam, for they are not only un-Islamic but anti-Islamic. We have passed legislation to address foreign terrorist fighters. We have established the National Counter-Terrorism Centre. And next month, we will also host an international seminar on counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization.

The United Nations is still the best-placed Organization to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The knowledge, practices and power of convening that the United Nations draws on are unmatched. Yet there is a recurring concern that we hear — a concern that we ourselves have voiced — namely, the need to increase representation in the main bodies of the United Nations. Small States such as the Maldives are often underrepresented, because our delegations are small and our capabilities are stretched. Every Member of the Organization must have an opportunity to serve and have an equal chance to be part of every body, especially the Security Council, in order to help make decisions that affect us all. We do not believe that might or size should determine destiny. Our ability, our motivation, our will to work and our ideas are more appropriate criteria.

For the first time since it joined the Organization, 51 years ago, the Maldives has boldly put forward its candidature to the Security Council for the 2019-2020 term. That is because we believe that the opportunity should be available to all and because we believe that we can serve. We believe that intent, resolve, fairness and the principle of representation must decide such opportunities.

In an ever-changing world, that which defines success for countries is the ability to adapt according to changing needs. The resilience of countries, continued investment and continuous will to work are critical. As a small island State, we face myriad challenges and vulnerabilities. But today we ask Members to value us because of our abilities, not our vulnerabilities. Evaluate our progress relatively, not against inapt benchmarks. We may be small, but we surely can be significant.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Lyonpo Damcho Dorji, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Mr. Dorji (Bhutan): At the outset, I have the honour to convey the warm greetings of His Majesty the King and the people of Bhutan. I congratulate the President on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session and assure him of my delegation's full support in the discharge of his responsibilities. His distinguished predecessor, Mr. Morgens Lykketoft, deserves our special appreciation for the excellent manner with which he steered the work of the seventieth session.

We meet at a time defined by breakthrough agreements. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change stand as testimonies to our collective resolve to advance peace, security, human rights and sustainable development. Those agreements underscore our commitment to multilateralism and serve as a reaffirmation of our faith in the purposes and principles of the United Nations. Together they present a historic opportunity to secure the collective hopes and aspirations of humankind.

We have undoubtedly made a good start on that monumental journey. However, let us be clear that many serious global challenges persist. We continue to witness wanton acts of terrorism and protracted conflicts that undermine the security, well-being and human rights of millions of people. Terrorism is the most flagrant violation of human rights, and we strongly condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It afflicts many nations and peoples, and the imperative to redouble international cooperation to combat that scourge is vital and urgent. Over the past five years, at least 15 major conflicts have erupted around the world.

Mr. El Haycen (Mauritania), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Today we are witnesses to the largest displacement of people fleeing violence and conflict since the founding of the United Nations. The value of the arms trade and global military expenditures has exceeded Cold-War levels. The current stockpile of nuclear weapons is enough to destroy our planet hundreds of times over. That unimaginable destructive power still looms as a grave threat. All of those facts serve as an acute reminder that our quest for peace and security remains unfulfilled.

On the development front, significant gaps and challenges to successfully achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) confront us. For instance, the Secretary General's June 2016 report to the Economic and Social Council on the SDGs highlights (E/2016/75) that one in eight people suffers from the abject despair of extreme poverty. About 800 million people suffer from hunger. More than 2 billion are affected by water scarcity. And 1.1 billion people live without electricity. Thousands of children die every day, mainly from preventable causes. Children make up nearly half of the almost 900 million people living on

less than $1.90 per day. About 124 million children do not attend school, and two out of five leave primary school without basic skills.

Much remains to be done to accelerate the rate of progress in achieving gender parity and promoting the rights of women. We need to make concerted efforts to close the economic gap between men and women. Likewise, glaring inequalities within and among nations persist, despite substantial gains in global economic output. And addressing the employment challenge remains a daunting and complex task.

The risk of catastrophic climate change is no longer an abstract and long-term threat. Climate change is real, and countries in special situations, such as the least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS), are the most vulnerable. We have all experienced the impact of climate change, which is devastating and destabilizing, as can be seen from the frequency and intensity of recent weather events. In July we in Bhutan suffered extensive destruction and damage to property and infrastructure caused by unprecedented flash floods. Even as we deal with those long-standing challenges, the digital revolution, while opening new frontiers of opportunity by spurring global integration and catalysing a fourth industrial revolution, is ushering in new and interlocking challenges that have social, political, economic and security implications that we have yet to fully comprehend.

We have to move past the euphoria of landmark agreements. Now more than ever before, we must find new political resolve for urgent, focused and comprehensive action that involves all stakeholders at the national, regional and international levels — action that translates agreements into real and meaningful dividends for all peoples and all countries.

The scale, scope and complexity involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda should not be underestimated, especially given the time frame of fewer than 15 years. The focus now and in the years ahead must be on implementation. The principles and objectives of the 2030 Agenda are consistent with Bhutan's national development framework based our concept of Gross National Happiness. Guided by that timeless vision propounded by our kings, we have always ensured that peace, happiness and the well-being of our people remained at the core of all our endeavours. Formerly a closed subsistence economy with no electricity or roads, Bhutan today is a rapidly emerging economy that aspires to achieve holistic development. With the accelerated development of our hydropower sector, the next 15 years are expected to usher in even greater transformation.

Bhutan has successfully aligned the SDGs with our national priorities and integrated them into our development-planning framework. The next decade will be critical as we seek to consolidate development gains and work towards realizing our national development goals of eradicating poverty, promoting inclusive and sustained economic growth, achieving self-reliance and eventually graduating from the least-developed-country category. We will continue to work in earnest to ensure the effective implementation of the SDGs, so that we succeed in achieving the transformation that we all seek. That is particularly important, as Bhutan faces immense challenges as an LDC and as a landlocked country. In that endeavour, the role of our development partners is critical.

The effectiveness of national strategies and investment plans, in both the formulation and the implementation, depends on predictable commitments of financial, technical and policy support measures from development partners. Our partners' emphasis needs to shift from the expression of approximate broad support measures for the benefit of LDCs as a group to what is necessary at the country level. Financing for development, particularly commitments to official development assistance, must be disaggregated at the country level, so that they can be expressed in national budgets aimed at financing short-, medium- and long-term investment plans. Without such predictability, it is impossible for LDCs to formulate the integrated and effective strategies and plans needed to achieve the SDGs. In that regard, allow me to share some of our experiences, so as to illustrate how the predictability of financing allows for more ambitious plans.

In 1992, we established the Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation — the world's first environmental trust fund — to protect our pristine environment and rich biodiversity through the implementation of conservation programmes. Similarly, in 1998, we established the Health Trust Fund, which today sustainably finances the essential drug needs that are fundamental to our free health-care system. Recently, in collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund, we launched the Bhutan for Life Project, an innovative financing initiative based on a project-financing-

for-permanence model. Funds generated through the project will be used to maintain and manage Bhutan's protected areas, parks and biological corridors in perpetuity, as well as to promote sustainable livelihoods for the communities in the area. We hope to expand that innovative financing model with development partners to cover other critical sectors such as sustainable energy, education and infrastructure development.

The success of the 2030 Agenda will ultimately hinge on the quality of partnerships involving Governments, the private sector and civil society at the national, regional and global levels. Partnerships in innovative financing for development will be vital for groups of countries in special situations, namely, the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. We look forward to the continued support of our development partners and well-wishers.

Bhutan's commitment and contributions to the conservation and preservation of the environment, the protection of biodiversity and the mitigation of climate change have been widely acknowledged. That commitment dates back more than two decades, when we took a deliberate decision to shift our forest policy away from revenue generation towards environmental protection by banning the export of raw timber, despite our limited resources. Furthermore, in 2008, we pledged to safeguard our forests through a constitutional mandate that requires maintaining a minimum of 60 per cent of our land under forest cover in perpetuity. Today, 75 per cent of our land is covered in forest, and 38 per cent of our total land area has been designated as national protected areas. In 2009, we committed to remaining carbon neutral, but in reality we are carbon negative, and we look forward to ratifying the Paris Agreement on Climate Change upon completion of internal processes.

Effective multilateralism requires an effective United Nations — one that is fit for the purpose. Since the founding of the United Nations, the world has undergone profound changes. Its membership has increased fourfold, and the challenges we face have become more complex. Institutions cannot be static. They must evolve and adapt, so as to remain relevant and effective. The United Nations and its principal organs must be reformed in keeping with contemporary realities — in particular the Security Council, so as to make the Council more representative, transparent and accountable and to enhance its legitimacy and credibility. Similarly, the 2030 Agenda requires a United Nations development system that is able to deliver integrated and coordinated policy support. In that regard, it is essential to achieve an ambitious outcome to the new quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system — one that matches the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda.

Bhutan has been blessed with peace, progress and stability under the enlightened leadership of our monarchs. We embraced democracy in a unique manner, as it was imposed on us by our kings and not born out of popular unrest or strife. I am pleased to state that our transition to democracy is on a firm footing, with democratic institutions in place, supported by a vibrant and independent media.

Peace and security is a shared concern and responsibility. Bhutan is committed to supporting United Nations peacekeeping endeavours to maintain peace, protect civilians and create the conditions necessary for lasting and durable solutions to conflicts around the world. Despite our limitations and constraints, we joined the fraternity of troop- and police-contributing countries in 2014. That is a reflection of our commitment to share the burden along with other Member States. Today, we have a presence in 10 peacekeeping missions, and we hope to broaden and deepen our peacekeeping engagement in the coming years.

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon completes his tenure in December, I wish to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude and appreciation to him for his leadership, service and contributions to the important work of the United Nations. We wish him and his family every success in all their future endeavours.

Second chances are rare in life. The agreements that we adopted in 2015 have given us an extraordinary opportunity to bring about greater peace, progress and prosperity for all. History will judge us by our ability to translate those compacts into meaningful and concrete results. Let us not squander this historic opportunity.

Addressing our peace, security and sustainable development challenges requires global action, underpinned by the solidarity of all Member States and bound together by a strong esprit de corps at the United Nations. In that context, I would like to end with a quote by His Majesty the King of Bhutan:

> "Individual or even national success is a ship that cannot carry everyone together to the same place at the same time. Rich nations must stop and be mindful of the poorer ones left behind. Successful people must stop and remember those who did not make it. No nation today can stand alone in achievement. Time is slowly telling us that there can be no lasting individual success without success as a community, and there cannot be lasting national progress and success if it does not fit into a future of global peace, harmony and equality. The world must progress together or fail together."

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Elvin Nimrod, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Legal Affairs, Carriacou and Petite Martinique Affairs and Local Government of Grenada.

Mr. Nimrod (Grenada): I am pleased to extend the usual warm greetings from the Government and the people of Grenada, on whose behalf I am privileged to address the General Assembly and its members. I am also pleased to join colleagues who spoke before me in thanking the President of the General Assembly at its seventieth session, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft of Denmark, for his energetic and focused leadership. I commend Mr. Lykketoft for so diligently charting the course towards transforming our world through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

I must also congratulate and thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his extraordinary leadership of the United Nations, and express our deep gratitude, especially for the keen interest he has shown in addressing the developmental challenges facing small island developing States. I also wish to assure the incoming President, Ambassador Peter Thomson of Fiji, of my delegation's full cooperation and support as he encourages cooperation under this session's theme: that is,"The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world".

Allow me to use this rostrum to recognize the contribution of a gigantic Grenadian personality who passed away this week — Sir Lamuel Stanislaus, who served Grenada, the region and the Organization with distinction and honour for over a decade as Grenada's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and one year as Vice-President of the General Assembly. Sir Lamuel was the embodiment of diplomacy and statesmanship. His contributions transcend nationality, geography and subject matter. His was an eloquent and convincing voice in this Hall, addressing issues on behalf of his country and his region. May his soul rest in peace. I believe it is ironic that that very noble gentleman was buried today, the same day in which Grenada addresses the Assembly.

Grenada unwaveringly recommits to the United Nations and its principles, as outlined in the Charter. Our commitment to the norms of peace, equality, justice, human rights and multilateralism is clear. At home, Grenada continues to embrace opportunities to consolidate democratic values and practices in civic life. I am proud to inform the Assembly that on 27 October, Grenadians' voices will be heard on the matter of broad constitutional reform.

I hail from the tiny island of Carriacou, which, together with Petite Martinique, forms my constituency and part of mainland Grenada, and makes up our tri-island State. One of the possible results of the upcoming referendum could be a change in the name of the State so as to better represent the collective identity of our nation.

The reforms also include amendments to the Bill of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, which would guarantee access to public education to every Grenadian child up to 16 years of age, and would further ensure that children with disabilities are afforded public education tailored to their specific needs up to age 18.

Grenada is committed to Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which speaks to gender equality and discrimination against women and girls. The reforms also call on the State to ensure that men and women enjoy equal rights and status in all spheres of life, especially in economic, educational, political, civic and social activities; that women are not discriminated against by reason of marital status, pregnancy or any other gender-based attribute; and that Parliament can enact suitable laws to correct disparities and inequalities between men and women.

We live in a world that is plagued with many challenges: civil wars, famine, droughts, floods, the impacts of climate change, humanitarian and economic crises, and terrorism. But we also built the United Nations for the express purpose of addressing such challenges. The United Nations was built to steer us away from anarchy and perpetual antagonism.

With the 17 Sustainable Development Goals we have created a new pathway to achieve a more equitable

and lasting brand of development. That pathway is paved with clean energy, universal access to education, affordable health care, food security, clean water and air, and gender and racial equality. History has shown that development is tenuous whenver human rights and the environment are not prioritized. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are the product of deep reflection and learning, and the realization that development without human rights and environmental considerations is unreliable.

Despite the remarkable progress made on each of the Millennium Development Goals, the fact that at least $2.5 trillion will be needed each year for the SDGs signals the size of the gap that remains to be addressed.

Grenada is resolute in its commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 14, on the conservation and promotion of the sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources. Earlier this year, Grenada hosted Blue Week 2016. That conference was held in collaboration and partnership with the Governments of the Netherlands and Indonesia and with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank, the Global Forum on Oceans, Coasts and Islands, the Clinton Climate Initiative, the Caribbean Challenge Initiative and The Nature Conservancy. At that event, we employed the innovative and popular "shark-tank" approach, which allowed local and international ocean entrepreneurs to pitch project ideas for funding. The rationale was that we cannot continue to merely talk about problems at ocean conferences; we need to facilitate solutions and commitments for the sustainable development and use of our oceans.

The ocean economy is a very important starting point for thinking about conservation. The natural capital of the ocean is like the principal deposited in an interest-bearing bank account. Unfortunately, instead of living off the interest, we have been drawing down from the principal.

The work done by World Wide Fund for Nature International and the Boston Consulting Group on the Ocean Economy has described the estimated $24 trillion asset value of the oceans, which generates some $2.5 trillion per year. The need to preserve that natural capital is self evident. But when we consider data provided by the World Bank and FAO, we see that the world is losing $83 billion per year from unsustainable fisheries practices. Nine Caribbean nations have committed to conserving and managing 20 per cent of their marine and coastal environments by 2020. I am pleased to note that Grenada has committed to conserving 25 per cent of its coastal area and marine resources by 2020. Both of those commitments are well above target 5 of Goal 14 of the SDGs, which calls for 10 per cent conservation by 2020.

Small island nations in the Caribbean and the Pacific must be lead advocates for oceans and climate change. Most of us have more space in the sea than we do on land. In Grenada, for instance, our maritime territory is 75 times our land mass. The ratios are even higher for other archipelagoes. That is why Grenada is pleased to play a leading role, not only in the Blue Network, but also in the Blue Guardians, facilitated by the Clinton Foundation and the Global Island Partnership initiatives for islands. We invite other countries to partner with us and participate in both.

Grenada is also helping the Blue Network create an online database and platform for ocean-related projects seeking funding. That initiative, called BluNet, will be showcased at Oceans Day during the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in November this year in Marrakesh, Morocco.

Financing difficulties and our small size severely affect our ability to invest in renewable energy projects. Today Grenada calls on Member States, especially the ones that possess the technology and technical capacity, to continue to work with small island developing States so as to increase their ability to harness existing renewable energy opportunities.

Grenada is almost 100 per cent reliant on imported fossil fuels for electricity generation. As a result, our development is held hostage to global price fluctuations and the high cost of electricity generation. We therefore call for easier access to the Green Climate Fund to support renewable energy projects in small island developing States.

In that regard, Grenada calls for a commitment from world leaders to deposit their instruments of ratification of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change by the end of 2016. We hope that the twenty-second session of the Conference of the Parties, which will be held in about six weeks, will build on the gains of the previous session and garner the necessary momentum to enable the full implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Grenada further calls upon the international community to work with Grenada and other small island developing States on innovative approaches to international climate financing, which would include catalysing private investment.

Like many small island developing States, we suffer from debt overhang, which limits the fiscal space needed to address climate challenge. While the International Monetary Fund has consistently expressed satisfaction with Grenada's response aimed at addressing the structural deficiencies that are both a symptom and a cause of that overhang, that response has, unfortunately, required a huge sacrifice on the part of our citizens, who are already suffering from climate change, fossil fuel dependence and the financial crisis. Those three problems compound one another and collectively limit our ability to invest in climate action that can actually alleviate all three issues, which has created a vicious circle.

Working with partners, Grenada will optimize various leadership platforms to create practical, concrete initiatives to turn that vicious circle into a virtuous one, where climate action can catalyse a wave of public and private investment that can alleviate all three problems. Such measures would help small States like Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique take action to combat climate change and its impacts in areas such as potable water supply, renewable energy and energy efficiency, climate-smart agriculture, climate-resilient homes and buildings and resilient coasts and oceans, to name a few. Those are the developments that our people are demanding, not for tomorrow but for today. When we observe the climate changes in our world today and their effects on humankind, we owe it to ourselves and succeeding generations to act with immediacy — we must act now.

As we attempt to transform our world, we are confronted with certain global financial policies and actions that pose significant threats to our region's sustainable development. Exclusion from correspondent banking services and de-risking, blacklisting and premature graduation to middle-income status are measures that negatively affect Caribbean economies. The unilateral and premature graduation of many small island developing States to middle-income status without consideration of our region's specific vulnerabilities has resulted in significant budgetary shortfalls, adversely affecting our economic and social development.

Our region has inherent structural economic challenges that already restrict the pace of our development. We ask that those impediments to growth be taken into account when our cases come up for consideration. Indeed, the current formula generalizes where generalizations should not be made. Outside of per capita gross domestic product (GDP), the intragroup differences among countries with middle-income status are astounding. Economists today admit that inequality had not been treated with any depth until very recently. Economists also readily admit that GDP is an imperfect measure of development.

The withdrawal of correspondent banking services from Caribbean Community member States can be seen as an economic assault that will destabilize the financial sector of our already vulnerable economies. For small economies like ours, the impact could be enormous. To give one example, the World Bank has indicated that more than 90 per cent of remittances are transferred through correspondent banking services. Remittances contribute in real and significant terms to the GDP of small nation-States. The World Bank goes on to state that a sudden stop in remittances in economies that rely on those flows could pose a significant threat to the socioeconomic stability of the region.

Grenada applauds the progress made in the recent rapprochement between Cuba and the United States. Grenada sees the peaceful resolution of some of the issues in those relations through dialogue as an example to be emulated between and among all States where violence, conflicts or disputes prevail. Grenada reiterates that it neither promulgates, applies nor condones laws or measures that encroach upon or undermine the sovereign rights of any State, nor laws that restrict or hinder international trade or navigation by any State. Consequently, we issue another clarion call for the total lifting of the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on the Government and the people of Cuba by the United States of America.

As we forge ahead, it is important to bear in mind that poverty is multidimensional in nature and that its implications for our youth and women go beyond the concepts of income or consumption. The problems affecting our youth cannot be resolved only by addressing unemployment and poor working conditions we must also provide access to health care and decent opportunities. We must ensure that we are building the necessary skills and knowledge for that group to undertake economic activities, with an emphasis

on vocational training, entrepreneurial skills and innovation for our young people.

We recognize the importance of regional cooperation and international partnerships in addressing the scourge of non-communicable diseases. We are adopting a holistic approach by utilizing the United Nations system, the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization to provide a basis for the health agenda and to guide us forward. Of particular importance is assistance in addressing our capacity constraints, facilitating knowledge-sharing and allowing the use of innovative approaches that could be adapted to the needs of our country. President Obama, in his address to the Assembly a few days ago (see A/71/PV.8), reiterated that the health issues that we currently face respected no walls or boundaries. Let us therefore pool our collective energy and resources to build capacity to rid humankind of those scourges.

Grenada continues its clarion call for a negotiated two-State settlement between Israel and Palestine. No matter what road is taken, the end result must enable the full economic, social, political and religious self-determination of the Palestinian people. Grenada recognizes the struggles of the Palestinian people and beseeches the international community to reject mere political pragmatism and the status quo while generations are being lost.

The United Nations membership must make Article 1, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations a major priority in the next few years. Our founding fathers called for the Organization to

> "achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion".

We must do everything in our power to provide additional economic opportunities for the developing world. I therefore call on the Economic and Social Council to actively pursue efforts to create an environment that enables Member States to raise the standard of living of their peoples. In our current global context, we must be conscious that inclusion in the global economy is vital.

Finally, I must recall Article 1, paragraph 1, of the Charter, which calls for the Organization to

> "maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace".

We must be relentless in our pursuit of the aims of the Organization. Our challenge is to work towards the elimination of terrorism, terrorist activities and armed conflicts around the world. Our quest must be to create economic opportunities for all States. And our goal should be the peaceful coexistence of all peoples of the international community. Indeed, if we can achieve that, we will be well on our way to transforming our world.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Isselkou Ould Ahmed Izid Bih, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

Mr. Bih (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a great honour for me to begin by congratulating Mr. Peter Thomson on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. I wish him every success in the noble task that has been conferred upon him. I would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Mogens Lykketoft for all the hard work he undertook during his presidency at the seventieth session of the General Assembly.

I also with to take this opportunity to underscore the tireless work undertaken by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in the service of peace and security. His skills, leadership and ability to keep a close eye on the major problems facing our planet and to react accordingly have enabled us to foster a spirit of tolerance, mutual understanding and cooperation at the international level.

Mauritania, under President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, is playing a crucial role in the maintenance of peace and security in the Sahel and Sahara regions through an approach based on openness, dialogue and professionalism. Despite a complex regional backdrop, our efforts have been successful, in particular in the fight against several terrorist groups and organizations, following lengthy struggles throughout 2010 and 2011.

Experts agree nonetheless that Mauritania represents an exception in terms of its success in fighting terrorism and extremist violence. Having managed to quash these effectively since 2011, we have also reinforced our security and defence capabilities without undermining individual or collective liberties and freedoms. We have continued to focus our full

attention on sustainable development and the needs of those who are most vulnerable within society.

According to Reporters Without Borders, Mauritania has been ranked first among all Arab nations in terms of freedom of expression and freedom of the press for three years now. Furthermore, according to a recent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, Mauritania is the leading country in the subregion in the UNDP Human Development Index. We have succeeded in guaranteeing and ensuring freedom of expression and the right to protest, demonstrate and assemble, meaning that we escaped unscathed from the so-called Arab Spring, which afflicted so many of our Arab brothers.

We have maintained open channels of dialogue between the majority Government and the opposition since the elections in 2011. That has allowed us to undertake profound regulatory and legislative reforms, particularly regarding the empowerment of Mauritanian women and the strengthening of the values of citizenship, respect for others and social harmony.

It is our belief that security and development are intrinsically linked, which is why we have adopted a very robust policy to tackle corruption, particularly with regard to public expenditure and procurement. We have also set in motion a series of initiatives to root out corruption in the private sector. That has allowed us to raise the necessary funds to increase our security and also create youth employment opportunities. That rational and judicious policy has led to unprecedented progress and development in many economic sectors. Infrastructure, roads, ports, hospitals and universities have undergone major construction programmes, and there have been improvements in electricity production thanks to our use of both traditional and renewable energy resources. We have also increased the number of homes with direct access to safe drinking water, particularly for families that have been living in shanty towns for more than 50 years.

Mauritania straddles the Arab Mahgreb world and the Saharan world, with a long Atlantic coastline on one border and the Sahara desert on another. Because of our geographical location, we are a key player in the security and economic panorama of West Africa. It is our desire to create harmony and understanding between the subregions to which we belong — the Mahgreb and sub-Saharan Africa — through a policy of good neighbourliness. We have adopted a neutral policy by way of response to the various conflicts in our region and with regard to the conflict in Western Sahara. It has always been our desire to remain neutral and support the efforts of the United Nations to find a permanent solution to the Western Sahara conflict. It is a conflict that is holding back integration and development in our region, and there is an urgent need to solve it.

Our credibility on a continental level was reflected during our presidency of the African Union in 2014. We also presided over the African Union Peace and Security Council in 2014, when we led and participated in many intiatives, especially in seeking to resolve the crises in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Mali and Burundi, to name but a few places. I am sure the Assembly recalls the courageous act of our President himself when he landed in Kidal, Mali, in a helicopter in 2014 during a period when the town was ravaged by conflict. Such a courageous act paved the way to the renewal of direct negotiations between the parties to the conflict. Furthermore, Mauritania is home to more than 60,000 Malian refugees in the Mbera camp in the east of the country.

Despite our scarcity of material and human resources as well as of natural resources, and notwithstanding the sensitivity of our geopolitical situation, we have contributed to many peacekeeping operations upon the request of the United Nations. We have deployed contingents in Côte d'Ivoire and the Central African Republic, and the leaders of those missions have all spoken warmly of the professionalism and ethical behaviour of the Mauritanian troops. Furthermore, police contingents from Mauritania are currently deployed in the Central African Republic, a presence requested and approved by the United Nations.

Mauritania took the lead in organizing the Group of Five for the Sahel, with Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania as members, and we are honoured to currently occupy the post of Secretary-General of the Group. It is our responsibility to coordinate the actions of these five countries in matters of security and good governance, while focusing in particular on the needs of the most remote and least populated areas. We have developed various programmes and initiatives, which have drawn the favourable attention of our international partners.

Mauritania warmly welcomed the opportunity to host the latest Arab Summit. Despite the short notice

and the complex set of circumstances currently faced by the Arab region, we were nonetheless glad to take on that responsibility. We are convinced that, whatever the differences may be among our countries, each Arab Summit provides a valuable opportunity to bring about reconciliation between our countries and to brainstorm about our present and our future together. This very well-organized Summit produced some excellent resolutions, and we believe it sent a strong message, received in many countries, to all who seek to hold Arab brotherhood responsible for the propagation of unacceptable messages and for wreaking havoc.

We feel that we bear responsibility towards the greater Arab nation. That is why we attach a great deal of importance to the rights of the Palestinian people and their right to enjoy dignity and sovereignty as a State. The Palestines have a right to an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital. It is our belief that the ongoing violations of human rights in Palestine and in other Arab territories occupied by Israel serve only to increase instability and further provoke the spread of violent extremism and terrorism throughout the world.

We would like to address all the parties to the bloody conflicts in countries such as Yemen, Libya and Syria, our brother Arab nations. We ask them to choose the path of wisdom with the best interests of their people at heart. We live in a global village where it is no longer possible to end conflict by military means, however strong an army might be.

The principle of the judicial immunity of States is a cornerstone of our international system, yet terrorism and violent extremism, together with drug trafficking, pose major challenges to international peace, security and order. Hence, States must develop synergies and join forces to tackle those challenges and overcome them together. Any national legislation that runs counter to international law, particularly as concers the judicial immunity of States, will undermine the efforts by the international community to tackle the aforementioned scourges.

Climate change is also a major threat to sustainable development, particularly in the regions of the Sahel and the Sahara. Mauritania, as is the case for many countries in the subregion, must face that problem squarely. Since the desert sands of the Sahara cover much of our country's surface, environmental issues must necessarily cut across all aspects of our national policies, particularly those relating to economic development, if we are to pursue sustainable development. We have been able to limit the phenomenon of desertification. Thanks to our efforts and to the sponsorship of the President of the Republic of Mauritania, we have engaged in a tree-planting programme throughout the country to reverse the process of desertification. Our natural resources have also been included in an effective protection mechanism. Mauritania was chosen to host the Panafrican Agency of the Great Green Wall, an ambitious project of the African Union Commission that covers approximately 7,000 kilometres from west to east, linking the Atlantic coast with the Red Sea, in the fight against environmental degradation.

We have also been carefully protecting our fish stocks for future generations. We look favourably on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and it is our cherished hope that all parties will respect their commitments under it.

Mauritania aspires to the full implementation of an inclusive and ambitious work plan for cities and urban spaces that will flesh out the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Goals and its 169 targets. The modernization of our cities and towns will provide decent living standards for inhabitants and will ensure that social inclusion is tailored to the requirements of each individual and each setting. It is important to ensure that social development planning meets the need for dignity and decent living standards in urban spaces. We hope that Habitat III, to be held in October in Quito, will be a success and fully reflect the aspirations and hopes of our people. Our desire is to be able to achieve a holistic and comprehensive solution that strikes a balance between urban and rural living conditions.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): We have heard the last speaker on the list of speakers in the general debate for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that, in accordance with decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first statement and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mrs. Özgür (Turkey): Turkey's position on Syria with regard to the political and humanitarian aspects was shared on the first day of the general debate with representatives at the highest political levels of United

Nations membership (see A/71/PV.8). I have nothing to add to that position. I wish to emphasize, however, our dismay at certain remarks in the statement delivered by the Syrian regime's representative (see A/71/PV.20). It included distorted facts and baseless accusations, including those regarding Turkey. We reject them in their entirety. We are confident that, eventually, those responsible for the destruction of Syria and the suffering of the Syrian people will be held accountable for their crimes. Until then, Turkey will stand by the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people.

Ms. Rakhmatia (Indonesia): Indonesia would like to exercise its right of reply to the statements delivered by the representatives of the Solomon Islands (see A/71/PV.18) and Vanuatu (see A/71/PV.19), and the similar statements by the representatives of Nauru (see A/71/PV.13), the Marshall Islands (see A/71/PV.15), Tuvalu (see A/71/PV.19) and Tonga (see A/71/PV.19), regarding matters concerning Papua, a province of Indonesia.

Indonesia is shocked to hear that, at this important stage, where leaders are gathered in the General Assembly to address the early implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the transformation of our collective action, and other global challenges, such as climate change — whose severest impact is felt by Pacific countries — the State leaders chose instead to violate the Charter of the United Nations by interfering in another country's sovereign affairs and attempting to violate its territorial integrity.

We categorically reject the continuing insinuations in their statements, which clearly reflect an unfortunate lack of understanding of the history, current situation and progressive developments in Indonesia, including in the provinces of Papua and West Papua. Couched in unfriendly rhetoric and smacking of a political manoeuver, those politically motivated statements were designed to support separatist groups in the State provinces, groups that have persistently engaged in inciting public disorder and in conducting armed terrorist attacks on civilians and security personnel.

The statements made by those countries clearly violate the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the principle of international law concerning friendly relations among States, as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. I reiterate that it is a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. It is highly regrettable and dangerous for States to misuse the United Nations, including the Assembly. Those countries are using the Assembly to advance their domestic agenda and, in some cases, in an attempt to divert attention from political and social problems at home. Those countries mentioned are also using false and fabricated information as the basis for their statements. The conduct of those countries undermines the Charter of the United Nations and is detrimental to the credibility of the Assembly.

Indonesia's commitment to the protection of human rights is beyond question. Indonesia is a founding member of the Human Rights Council. Indonesia has already served as a member of the Council for three terms and is currently serving a fourth term. Indonesia initiated the Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Indonesia has ratified eight out of nine core international human rights instruments, which have all been incorporated into its national legal system — compared with just four by the Solomon Islands and five by Vanuatu.

Indonesia is among the few countries that have an ongoing national plan of action on human rights; it is currently working with the fourth iteration of the plan, which is for the 2015-2019 period. Indonesia has had an active and robust National Commission on Human Rights since 1993, as well as a vibrant civil society and free media. Indonesia is a country with a full-fledged, functioning democracy. In such a vibrant national democracy, where there is the highest commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights at all levels, it would be nearly impossible for any human rights allegations to go unnoticed or unscrutinized.

We reaffirm that there are domestic mechanisms in place at the national level in Indonesia, as well as at the provincial level in Papua and West Papua. For our part, we will continue to maintain appropriate focus on the development of the Papua and West Papua provinces in the best interests of all.

Let me conclude with a saying from our Asia-Pacific region, namely, that when one points the index finger at others, the thumb automatically points to one's own face.

Mr. Li Yongsheng (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): With respect to the arbitration unilaterally initiated by the Philippines in the matter of the South China Sea and the ruling in favour of the Philippines, the Chinese

Government and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs have made statements and issued a position paper expressing the position of China very clearly. I would like to reiterate here that the ruling is null and void and has no binding force. China neither recognizes nor accepts it. China's territorial sovereignty, maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea shall under no circumstances be affected by that ruling. China opposes and will never accept any claim or action based on it.

The Chinese Government will continue to abide by international law and basic norms governing international relations as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including the principles of respecting State sovereignty, territorial integrity and the peaceful settlement of disputes. To maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea, it will continue to work with the States directly concerned to resolve the relevant disputes in the South China Sea through negotiations and consultations, on the basis of respect for historical facts and in accordance with international law.

Mr. Bailen (Philippines): I wish to thank the representative of the People's Republic of China for his delegation's interest and attention with regard to the statement delivered earlier by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Mr. Perfecto Yasay. In further articulating my country's position, I will make a brief statement and will not exhaust my full 10 minutes.

We know the position and arguments expressed by the representative of China. As a fundamental point, may I state that China's position and arguments have been exhaustively discussed and addressed with finality in the award of the Arbitral Tribunal in the matter of the South China Sea Arbitration, rendered on 12 July 2016. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, to which the Philippines and China are States parties, provides that the award shall be final and shall be complied with by the parties. The Philippines, at the highest level, has announced its readiness to engage China in discussions to move forward on the resolution of the dispute. As a matter of fact, preliminary talks are now ongoing. At the same time, the Philippines, at the highest level, has announced that the award of the Arbitral Tribunal should be the starting point for the negotiation of the resolution.

To reiterate, this award is now a significant part of the corpus of jurisprudence in international law, in particular the law of the sea. It cannot be ignored, now or ever. It has clarified the maritime entitlements of both the Philippines and China with respect to the South China Sea, together with the respective rights and obligations in accordance with those entitlements.

The Arbitral Tribunal had jurisdiction over the dispute. On 29 October 2015, the Arbitral Tribunal issued a unanimous award finding that it had jurisdiction, and that that jurisdiction applies to China, even if it chose not to participate in the proceedings. It also held that the decision by the Philippines to commence arbitration unilaterally was not an abuse of the dispute settlement provisions of the Convention. On 12 July 2016, the Arbitral Tribunal rendered its award and the merits. I will not take up the General Assembly's precious time in summarizing the award, for it should be well known to all Member States. Let me only mention the highlights.

First, the Tribunal ruled that China's claims to historic rights, or other sovereign rights or jurisdiction, with respect to the maritime areas of the South China Sea encompassed by the relevant part of the "nine-dash line" are contrary to the Convention and without lawful effect to the extent that they exceed the geographic and substantive limits of China's maritime entitlements under the Convention. The Convention supersedes any historic rights, or other sovereign rights or jurisdiction, in excess of the limits imposed therein. The Convention defines the scope of maritime entitlements in the South China Sea, which may not extend beyond the limits imposed therein.

Second, the Tribunal ruled on the status, under the Convention, of various maritime features in the South China Sea, ruling specifically that none of them is an island within the meaning of article 121 of the Convention. Not one of them — not Scarborough Shoal, which the Chinese call Huangyan Dao, Johnson Reef, Cuarteron Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Gaven Reef (North), McKennan Reef, Mischief Reef nor Second Thomas Shoal — can sustain human habitation or economic life on their own and accordingly have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf.

Third, the Tribunal found that Mischief Reef and Second Thomas Shoal lie within 200 nautical miles of the Philippines coast, off Palawan Island, and are located in an area that is not overlapped by the entitlements generated by any maritime feature claimed by China. Mischief Reef and Second Thomas Shoal form part of the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf of the Philippines. According to the Tribunal, they are rocks — all of them.

Fourth, the Tribunal ruled that China, through the construction of installations and artificial islands at Mischief Reef without the authorization of the Philippines, violated articles 60 and 80 of the Convention with respect to the Philippines' sovereign rights in its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf, and that, as a low-tide elevation, Mischief Reef is not capable of appropriation.

Fifth, the Tribunal ruled that China interfered with the Philippines sovereign rights in its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf through China's operation of its marine surveillance vessels in 2011, in violation of article 77 of the Convention, with respect to the Philippines' sovereign rights over the non-living resources of the continental shelf in the area of Reed Bank, and through China's promulgation of the moratorium in 2012 on fishing in the South China Sea, without exception for areas of the South China Sea falling within the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines and without limiting the moratorium to Chinese flagged vessels, in violation of article 56 of the Convention, with respect to the Philippines' sovereign rights over the living resources of its exclusive economic zone.

Sixth, the Tribunal ruled that China, through the operation of its marine surveillance vessels, tolerated and failed to exercise due diligence to prevent fishing by Chinese flagged vessels at Mischief Reef and Second Thomas Shoal in 2013, and therefore failed to exhibit due regard for the Philippines' sovereign rights with respect to fisheries in its exclusive economic zone, in violation of article 58, paragraph 3, of the Convention.

Seventh, the Tribunal ruled that China, through the operation of its official vessels at Scarborough Shoal from May 2012 onwards, unlawfully prevented Filipino fishermen from engaging in traditional fishing at Scarborough Shoal.

Eighth, the Tribunal ruled that China violated its obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment through its toleration and protection of, and failure to prevent, Chinese fishing vessels from engaging in harmful activities of harvesting endangered species at Scarborough Shoal, Second Thomas Shoal and other features in the Spratly Islands, in violation of articles 192 and 194, paragraph 5, of the Convention, and through its island-building activities at Cuarteron Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Gaven Reef (North), Johnson Reef, Hughes Reef, Subi Reef and Mischief Reef, in violation of articles 192, 194, paragraph 1, 194, paragraph 5, 197, 123 and 206 of the Convention.

The Tribunal found, based on compelling evidence, expert reports and a critical assessment of Chinese claims, that China's artificial-island-building activities on the seven reefs in the Spratly Islands have caused devastating and long-lasting damage to the marine environment. The Tribunal also found that China did not fulfil its duties under articles 205 and 206 of the Convention to cooperate or coordinate with the other States bordering the South China Sea and to deliver an environmental impact assessment of the activities to a competent international body.

Ninth, the Tribunal ruled that China, by virtue of the conduct of Chinese law enforcement vessels in the vicinity of Scarborough Shoal, created a serious risk of collision, endangered the Philippine vessels and personnel, and thus violated article 94 of the Convention as well as rules 2, 6, 7, 8, 15 and 16 of the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972.

Tenth, the Tribunal ruled that China, in the course of the arbitration proceedings, aggravated and extended the dispute between the parties through its dredging, artificial-island-building and construction activities in the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf of the Philippines.

Mr. Li Yongsheng (China): The unilateral initiation of an arbitration proceeding by the Philippine's Government was done in bad faith. It aimed not to resolve the relevant disputes between China and the Philippines or to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea, but to deny China's territorial sovereignty, maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea. The initiation of this arbitration proceeding violates international law. The conduct of the Arbitral Tribunal and its ruling seriously contravene the general practice of international arbitration; completely deviate from the object and purpose of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which is to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes; substantially impair the integrity and authority of UNCLOS; gravely infringe upon China's legitimate right as a sovereign State and a State party to UNCLOS; and are unjust and unlawful.

(*spoke in Chinese*)

At the moment, thanks to the concerted efforts of China and countries of the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations (ASEAN), the situation in the South China Sea is progressing in a positive direction. Regional countries are working to bring the South China Sea issue back on the right track of dialogue and consultation in a forward-looking spirit. China stands ready to work with ASEAN countries under regional arrangements, pursuant to the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, to properly handle disputes, enhance mutual trust, steer clear of disruptions and jointly maintain the peace and stability of the South China Sea.

Mr. Bailen (Philippines): In reply to the statement made by the representative of China, may I just say that the arbitration proceedings, which were initiated by the Philippines, were not the root cause of the destabilization in the South China Sea. The root cause was China's unilateral and aggressive actions on the ground that changed the status quo and imposed its "nine-dash line" on other countries and China's island-building and escalation of activities in the area. Those include the increased presence of military assets and the possibility of the further militarization of outposts in the South China Sea, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions and undermined peace, security and stability in the region. That is the core issue. It has been recognized in documents of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at the level of foreign ministers and ASEAN leaders. The arbitration is the effort of the Philippines to resolve the dispute on an equal footing and under the rule of law.

Secondly, the arbitration has not aggravated the disputes in the South China Sea. Arbitration is widely recognized as a peaceful means of solving disputes. As the Arbitral Tribunal found, it had jurisdiction. The ASEAN Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea does not limit the Philippines to bilateral negotiations exclusively, especially if such bilateral negotiations prove to be unfair and one-sided. But having said that, I reiterate that the Philippines is now fully engaged and ready to talk with China on the basis of the arbitral award.

Thirdly, the arbitration does not derail the work of ASEAN and China on a code of conduct. The joint communiqué cited earlier by the ASEAN leaders states that ASEAN has urged all parties to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and the expeditious conclusion of a code of conduct to build, maintain and enhance mutual trust and confidence and to exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities with a view to creating a positive climate for the eventual resolution of all contentious issues. The future code of conduct can be concluded if all parties have the political will and determination to make it happen. The arbitration and the code-of-conduct consultations are moving on parallel tracks, and the Philippines is committed to both. The Philippines fully supports the effective role of its partners in ASEAN to pave the way forward.

Finally, may I just say that the decisions handed down by arbitral tribunals are binding, particularly as they relate to interpretations of international agreements and conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Arbitral Tribunal's award states that the decision is final and binding on the parties. It provides a sound basis for moving forward towards a new beginning: a rules-based regime in the South China Sea. We fully respect the Tribunal's award as an affirmation of UNCLOS. We believe in the fairness and thoroughness of the arbitral proceedings and its binding character, and in the need for all States parties and all members of the international community to respect this outcome. China's non-acceptance of the ruling will have grave consequences for international law and for UNCLOS in particular. I believe that we would not want that to happen.

Does the Government of China say that there is no international law in accordance with UNCLOS?

The meeting rose at 6.45 p.m.